

2018

Building a Blog/Building a Brand: Public Relations Campaign for "Goodwill Hunting" Fashion Blog

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Recommended Citation

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Public relations campaign for "Goodwill Hunting" fashion blog

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Yanik Gene Flowers

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in Communication Studies

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2018

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Running Head: BUILDING A BLOG | BUILDING A BRAND

Building a Blog | Building a Brand:

Public Relations Campaign for “Goodwill Hunting” Fashion Blog

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Abstract

The ability to consistently and cohesively communicate a brand's identity is the central focus of a public relations campaign. This project chronicled the creative and promotional efforts put forward to effectively communicate the brand of Goodwill Hunting - a fashion blog based on the thrift adventures of a 21-year-old college student. Exploring concepts embedded in branding, authenticity, blogging and social media; this campaign was able to establish and maintain a brand identity for Goodwill Hunting through the intentionality of content creation and promotional activity. Goodwill Hunting's blog site and Instagram account was ran for four months and the efforts of the campaign resulted in a 1,300+ page view increase, a steady increase of 100 followers a month on social media, and an offer to the blogger to consistently blog for the Goodwill industries. This campaign reflected upon how when all public relations activities serve to consistently and cohesively communicate a brand, it results in a well-established brand identity that an audience supports and identifies with.

Key words: branding, authenticity, blogging, social media, public relations, Instagram, promotional activity, audience, communication.

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This thesis is dedicated to all my fellow creative minds. Whether you are in the classroom, in the workforce, or at home; your creative space is where you are and your creative expression is invaluable. Follow your passions, do what you love and never be afraid to go against the grain. You might even get a graduate thesis out of it.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Matthew Gill for providing me with the guidance and mentorship needed to complete this project. I have the utmost respect for your experience and knowledge and I am forever grateful for the efforts you put forward to guide me through this journey. You have taught me more than you know.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Claudia Janssen Danyi and Dr. Stephen King. Your encouragement and feedback throughout this project made me work 10 times harder. To Dr. Marita Gronnvoll, thank you for reassuring me in those very first hard weeks of graduate school that I was in the right place. Those words of encouragement came at a time when I needed them the most.

To Elynn Mullaney, this project would not have been possible without your drive to pursue it with me. Having a friend like you that I could depend on and trust in made this journey fun and successful. To Meisha Simmons, thank you for lending your creative hand in this project whenever I needed it. You are a creative genius. To Raya Petty and Joshua Wall, your friendships mean a great deal to me. These last two years have met me with many accomplishments, and none of them would have been half as enjoyable without you two by my side.

Finally, to my foundation of love and support. Mom, Dad, and Rafiah, I owe everything I am and everything I accomplish to the unconditional love you three give to me. Thank you for telling me every single day that I can do every single thing. My strength to take on whatever tomorrow brings comes from your support. I love you guys.

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Introduction

In 2015 the *New York Times* ran an article detailing how online bloggers were the future of brand recognition because of the ubiquitous nature of digital influence and the bloggers' ability to generate sales (Hewitt, 2015). Marianna Hewitt (2015) of *lifewithme.com* agreed arguing that bloggers continuously generate revenue for themselves because companies are now relying on online influencers to promote their brands.

I will always remember three years ago when the subject of online blogging was brought up in one of my collegiate economic classes. The discussion of how internet bloggers used their platform to gain income quickly made me realize that the phenomena of blogging had graduated from a Tumblr fad to an economic topic. Beside the fact that we were discussing economic stagnation and Perez Hilton in the same breath, it was clear that in our pop-culture driven generation, where online influencers were creating the narrative, blogs were now proving their ability to become businesses. Blogs continue to rise in popularity as an important public relations tool because they distribute information strategically, but also allow users the ability to network quite easily. "Blogging's greatest benefit is social, not technological" (Cayzer, 2004, p.48). This benefit is salient in the planning and development of a public relations campaign.

21-year-old Elynn Mullaney has been an enthusiastic thrift shopper for the past six years and whole-heartedly believes that you do not have to spend a million bucks to look like a million bucks. She came to me with the utmost confidence in her knowledge

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of fashion and believed that she had something valuable to add to the societal fashion narrative. She believed that creating a fashion blog centered on her thrift adventures was the unique addition the world of fashion blogging needed. She wanted to produce content that showcased her fashion sense and her thrifting ability; the merging of those two ideas constituted the brand concept of her blog. My role, and the heart of the creative project, was to ensure all creative and promotional efforts effectively communicated this brand. With Mullaney having a clear vision of what she wanted her blog's brand to represent, I devoted my creative thesis to bringing that vision to life, and building a following for her vision.

The novelty of the project allowed me to be as creative as possible with the opportunity to build and design a blogging website from the ground up, as well as the social media account that complemented this blog's efforts. The essential task was to establish and communicate the brand identity of the fashion blog through a functional approach to my public relations campaign.

It was really important for me to dedicate my graduate thesis to the creative realm. The reason I executed this project was to highlight some of the complex theories behind what is viewed as some of the simplest public relations activities. This project acknowledges that there is much more that goes into taking a picture, designing a website, or choosing a hashtag when one must stay consistent with a brand message. My hope was that with me effectively explaining how theory informed these decisions, this project could reiterate the importance of the creative process to the communication discipline. The concepts that were explored to inform the decisions in this project were:

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branding, authenticity, blogging, and social media. These concepts were imperative to the success of this project and are fully explored in my literature review.

Literature Review

Brands and Branding

Before diving into the process of branding, it is important to first understand what a brand is and how it functions. Jones (1986) defines a brand as a “product that provides functional benefits plus added values that some consumers value enough to buy” (p.29). He explains how these “added values” are the most important elements of the definition because they focus on the product’s distinctiveness. Jones believes that the strongest brands are the ones that can effectively communicate their distinct benefits, as well as their added value. Jones discusses several areas in which a brand provides added value. He talks about the added value that comes from actually experiencing the brand, this includes known reliability, familiarity and reduction of risk. Consumers value having a brand that they know and can identify with. Jones also discusses the added value that comes from the type of people that consume the brand. This includes our need to associate with certain types of people; whether that be rich, young, glamorous, masculine, feminine, etc. He argues that there is value in association and consumers want a brand that reinforces their own personal identification. Jones also argues that there is added benefit from the belief that the brand is effective. This has to do with how people feel about the brand because consumers ultimately want a brand that they believe is doing its job. Jones final added benefit results from the appearance of the brand, which simply addresses how the brand is presented to its consumers, whether that be in its promotion or

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its packaging. This value focuses on the sheer aesthetic of the brand. Jones recognizes that a brand cannot be all things for all people because tastes differ. He believes that a brand which tries to appeal to too many benefits, ends up not effectively appealing to any. That is why he stresses the importance of being clear when communicating brand benefits.

Donahue-Piro (2016) talks about her experiences working with emerging brands and claims that many people think they understand the concept of branding only to discover that they do not. “A brand is what people think when they hear the product’s name and branding is what people think about your brand”(p.26). Essentially, whatever the audience thinks or associates with your product or service constitutes the brand’s identity. If I have a fashion blog that is all about thrifting and the thrift adventures of the blogger, things associated with thrifting should be what comes to mind when the audience thinks about blog. And then what my audience thinks about the brand, is rooted in how well it is communicated; the branding process. Donahue- Piro goes on to discuss that when starting a business, the establishment of a brand is how you control the perception of what you are producing. According to Donahue- Piro, “Your brand needs to be documented and trained upon. It can’t just be in your head hoping everyone follows it. It needs to be clearly documented and adhered to!” (p.26). Both Jones (1986) and Donahue- Piro clearly express the importance of branding to the success of a product or service. But it is important to establish how to effectively communicate a brand to key stakeholders, and recognize branding as it functions in the world of public relations.

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Mikáčová and Gavlaková (2014) discuss public relations as it functions in the branding process. They make the claim that public relations functions in branding in two ways- “As the creator of narrative, i.e., the conversation and as the purveyor of the medium to facilitate the conversation, i.e., social media” (Mikáčová & Gavlaková, 2014, p.835). Mikáčová and Gavlaková conclude that public relations gives a voice to brand efforts, stating that “Public relations gives ‘legs’ and life to brand attitudes and the essential brand promise by telling credible stories and providing support for the truth of a brand’s advertising images. This is all the more important in an evolving media and business environment” (p.839). Marken (2001) discusses what the process of branding does for the public. “Branding is what makes some people in this mixed up world feel so strongly about a cause that they are willing to die for the cause” (p.33). While Marken definitely does not expect your brand to reach that level of commitment, he believes that it is public relation’s role to foster and communicate the bond between consumer and brand.

Turri, Smith and Kemp (2013) provide insight to how brands can develop affective brand commitment through the use of social media. “Brands, like humans, can serve as legitimate relationship partners. Brand relationships can provide consumers with resources in making decisions, meeting their needs, and motivating them. Marketers are using social media as a way to promote their brands and build consumer brand relationships” (Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2013, p.201). Turri, Smith and Kemp’s research claims that social media is an effective tool for brands to connect with their consumers emotionally and develop commitment through that connection. “Consumers prefer products with images that are congruent with their self-concepts. They often construct

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their self-identity and present themselves to others through their product and brand selections” (Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2013, p.203). Their research goes on to explain that connections to brands are created when brands work to co-create satisfaction of their consumers’ psychological need to reinforce their identity and connect with others. Brands essentially give consumers something to identify with. Strong attachments can manifest as a result of self-connections with a brand, and consumers may become committed to brands that help them create or represent their desired self-concepts (Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2013, p.203).

According to Wood (2000), the management of a brand is critical to its success and must be approached strategically. “In consumer marketing, brands often provide the primary points of differentiation between competitive offerings” (Wood, 2000, p. 662). Looking back at Jones’ (1986) work that discusses a brand as added value, Wood (2000) argues that these added values fit under a term called brand construct. The brand construct refers to how the brand is defined. “A brand may be defined from the consumers’ perspective and/or from the brand owner’s perspective in addition, brands are sometimes defined in terms of their purpose, and sometimes described by their characteristics” (Wood, 2000, p.664). Wood (2000) concludes that a brand must be aware of its construct for it to be successfully managed, and brand management should be strategic and holistic in order to ensure longevity. Regardless of how a brand is defined, it is the role of the public relations practitioner to communicate that brand.

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Communicating a Brand

Knapp (2000) challenges us to think about brand communication as a structured process. He even goes as far as to describe brand communication as a blueprint. “We focus on selecting the correct architectural components to maximize brand equity” (p.138). These architectural components consist of selecting the appropriate communication strategies that will bring the blueprint to life. Knapp strongly suggests outlining a written doctrine that details all communication relevant to a brand’s success. “If an organization has separate written plans for marketing, public relations, and internal communications, or other key activities that support the doctrine, then a ‘top line’ summary of all of these plans should be incorporated in the brand communication plan” (Knapp, 2000, p.139). This doctrine brings value to the communication process because it provides a roadmap for an organization’s commitment to the brand (Knapp, 2000). The brand team’s challenge is to recommend an external and internal communication plan that will either position, maintain, or enhance the brand’s desired perception based on all the information learned through this process (Knapp, 2000, p.139).

Society and technology today allows us to present our brands in a ubiquitous fashion. The power of social media cannot be ignored when effectively communicating a brand. Morton (2012) says that social media plays a huge role in disseminating a brand, and whether it is purposefully cultivated or not, most brands have an online presence. Morton (2012) emphasizes that social media is not only a great tool to communicate a brand, but to take charge of a brand’s presence by managing it. He discusses using various platforms to reinforce a brand through brand statements. “This helps create a

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cohesive, detailed and readily available platform for displaying your brand” (Morton, 2012, p.72)

Another important aspect of communicating your brand is communicating messages consistently and cohesively across all touch points. Navarro-Bailon (2012) discusses how cohesive and consistent messages help consumers understand what a brand stands for. “Inconsistent brand associations on the other hand, may result in a diffuse brand image that, in turn, leads to uncertain expectations and confusion” (Navarro-Bailon, 2012, p.189). Navarro-Bailon conducted a study with 198 students which tested their knowledge of brands with consistent cohesive messages. “Results suggest that brand image may be more benefited by strategic consistent messages because it makes consumers think more and positively about the brand that, in turn, determines the more positive evaluation of the brand” (Navarro-Bailon, 2012, p.198).

Burns (2017) defines social media as “Internet-based platforms that allow users to create profiles for sharing user generated or curated digital content in the form of text, photos, graphics, or videos within a networked community of users who can respond to the content” (p.6) According to John, Emrich, Gupta and Norton (2017) “Marketers spend billions of dollars each year on social media to establish and maintain a presence on social networking sites” (p.145). The use of social media has propelled branding into territory it never thought it would see. “Social media would allow your company to leapfrog traditional media and forge relationships directly with customers. If you told them great stories and connected with them in real time, your brand would become a hub for a community of consumers” (Holt, 2016, p.42). For example Smilansky (2015) says

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that image-based social media sites like Instagram play a huge role in documenting products and services and is key to the branding process. As an example he discusses how beneficial Instagram is to products and services that possess a clear visual quality; since Instagram is an image-based social media site it creates a platform for brands to visually communicate with customers. Another important concept in communicating a brand is whether or not that brand is considered to be authentic.

Authenticity

Authenticity is socially constructed. So whether a brand is considered to be authentic or not, is based on the interaction between stakeholders and the brand, including its communication. King (2006) says “All authenticity, in one form or another, is a constructed, rhetorical phenomenon—that is to say, from a constructivist perspective, absolute, genuine, “true” authenticity does not exist” (p.237). King (2006) informs us that things appear authentic because the concept of authenticity is rhetorical in nature. So brands must be strategic in the way they communicate their authenticity in order to appear authentic.

Fritz and Bruhn (2017) state that “Consumer demand for authentic brands is steadily rising. With increased pressure to accommodate this demand, researchers and marketers seek to understand how to influence a brand’s perceived authenticity” (p.324). Moulard, Raggio and Folsc (2016) discuss the concept of brand authenticity and state that “brand authenticity is analogous to the consumer perception that an organization (or brand) employs a product orientation” (p.421). This means that consumers will judge a

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brand as authentic when the brand is perceived to be associated with individuals who are interested in the products.

Molleda and Jain (2013) argue that “ The understanding of the association between perceived authenticity and reputation is relevant because we are living in more demanding political and socioeconomic environments which organizations aim to sustain their activities and operations with legitimacy and public acceptance” (p.436). The authors emphasize authenticity as one of the five elements that make up organizational reputation. “Consumers and other stakeholders evaluate organizational claims and promises against its actions and behavior to form perceptions of authenticity. Therefore, authentic organizations must demonstrate consistency with their core values in actions, behaviors, decisions, and communication with internal and external stakeholders” (Molleda & Jain, 2013, p.436). This means if a brand chooses to identify with a certain value, it must stay consistent in communicating that value in order to be perceived as authentic and gain public acceptance.

Kadirov (2015) takes the conversation about authenticity further, making claims that consumers have shifted their values from quality to a perception of brand authenticity. Kadirov (2015) wrote “Conceptually, brand authenticity perceptions refer to a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers” (p.1776). The more genuine a brand appears, the more authentic the brand is perceived. With King’s (2006) research emphasizing social construction as a key element of authenticity, it must be understood that this perception is something that brands must create. Beverland (2005) specifically discusses how paradoxical creating authenticity can become since brands

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have to remain true to their authentic core while remaining relevant. He claims that projecting authenticity means projecting a real image and a rhetorical one and feels the rhetorical aspect of authenticity lies in the sincerity of the story that it tells; Kadirov (2015) even describes brands as “artifacts of sincerity” (p.1777). This reiterates the idea that whatever is done in your branding process serves as proof of the brand’s authenticity.

According to Leight, Peters and Shelton (2006), there are three types of authenticity- constructive, objective and existential. This means that authenticity can be derived from three sources: the community (constructive), the object (objective) and the self (existential). Objective authenticity is “based on an object's or experience's degree of originality. Judging objects or experiences according to their extent of genuineness” (Leight, Peters & Shelton, 2006, p.483) while “existential authenticity is activity driven and coincides with post modern consumers' quest for pleasure and fun. This form of authenticity involves personal or subjective feelings activated by the liminal process of activities” (Leight, Peters & Shelton, 2006, p.483). The promotional and public relations nature of this project makes it much more concerned with constructive authenticity. “Constructive authenticity allows for different interpretations of reality on the basis of consumers' projections onto objects and is essentially symbolic” (Leight, Peters & Shelton, 2006, p.483). Much like King’s (2006) work, it focuses on authenticity being socially constructed. “This view adopts a social constructionist perspective in that no single version of history is pinpointed as the true origin, making it a socially negotiable concept that is relative, contextually determined, and ideologically driven” (Leight, Peters & Shelton, 2006, p.483).

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Marwick (2013) gives insight on authenticity as it relates specifically to fashion blogging. Marwick establishes that fashion bloggers view authenticity as “a set of affective relations between bloggers and readers” (p.1). Marwick drew on ethnographic interviews with 30 fashion bloggers and every fashion blogger had a chance to interact with the other blogs as well as reflect on their own blogging practices. Authenticity was a concept that was brought up constantly as something that the bloggers tried to achieve. According to Marwick three themes emerged from her discussion on authenticity- “First, an authentic blogger is one who reveals something about her true inner self. Second, as a real person, she extends her honesty and transparency to the relationships with her readers. And finally, an authentic fashion blogger expresses her personal style regardless of trends, sponsors, or free branded goods” (p.4). In order to understand the ways brands can communicate their authenticity, we need to take a deeper look at the phenomenon of blogging.

Blogging

Blogs, which refers to “web logs,” are platforms to share “decentralized informal knowledge” (Cayzer, 2004). This means that blogs share and manage information from the blogger’s point of view. Cayzer (2004) says that blogs continue to rise in popularity because of their ability to distribute information strategically. Bloggers enjoy the ability to network and collaborate with other bloggers in their community, while also appreciating how fast their content gets disseminated. Cayzer argues that because of the ease of use, the information that a blog produces is communicated more frequently. According to Marwick (2013) “Fashion blogging is an international subculture comprised

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primarily of young women who post photographs of themselves and their possessions, comment on clothes and fashion, and use self-branding techniques to promote themselves and their blogs” (p.1).

Baltzell (2016) offers five key concepts blogs should utilize to substantially boost their brand identity. He identifies the following: the preparation, the length and frequency, the content, the blogger and the time. The preparation according to Baltzell is important for someone writing a blog because it creates an “overall picture of themes covered in the blog” (p.18). He suggest that you plan and organize your content by creating a “calendar that covers topics relevant to the time of year” (p.18) This way, content and topics are communicated cohesively and there is no duplication in photos, keywords, or overviews. Length and frequency, are important because they allow you to plan out your strategy to communicate concisely. Baltzell suggests writing short paragraphs with bullet points and posting weekly based on your demand. The content is representative of what you are writing about; this is evidence of your efforts to reinforce your brand. Baltzell also discusses the person writing the blog, explaining that they should have excellent writing skills, confidence in their practice and a love for what they do because these qualities will help strengthen the brand’s identity, which will help in effectively communicating it. Lastly, Baltzell discusses the importance of time and timing when writing a blog. She highlights the importance of knowing the amount of research required for a blog post and the amount of time needed to write the post. because that will inform your decision on which post are needed for which day.

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Kent (2008) conducted a critical analysis of blogs as public relations tools and two types of blogs. First is the traditional or historic blog which is “written like a diary entry, or an opened page” (p.33). Second is the new blogs, which are “clearinghouses of news headlines or abstracts that usually link readers to an actual news story as a means of establishing ethos and credibility” (p.33). “Blog genres range from personal, diary-like pages to in-depth public affairs analysis....Some provide description of...elected links, others tell about details of a writer’s day, and some offer personal opinions and commentaries on the news of a day. Opinionated people, called bloggers, post their thoughts, experiences, and politics on blogs” (Kent, 2008, p.33).

Kent (2008) emphasizes several major strengths of blogs “including their usefulness as research tools, and their usefulness as message framing and persuasion tools” (p.34). Highlighting the rhetorical natural of blogs, Kent also discusses how blogs play a huge role in influencing individuals and publics. “Allowing or encouraging visitors to an organization’s Web site to participate in how online news and information is framed is possibly the greatest strength of blogs and the feature of the most importance to public relations practitioners” (Kent, 2008, p.35). The success of this project depended on how well I was able to encourage visitors to participate and interact with the vision that my client wanted to create. In my case section, I will explore the public relations activities that went into the process of encouraging that user participation.

Case



The fashion blog was titled “Goodwill Hunting” which is a play-on words from the 1997 movie of the same name, as well as the popular non-profit, Goodwill. When I presented this title to Mullaney, it was something that she and I agreed upon immediately because we felt like it represented the brand we were trying to communicate. It was important that all the creative and promotional decisions that were made not only benefited brand communication, but was driven by Mullaney’s vision for Goodwill Hunting. The following sections details how I designed the blog site and social media account and prepared to craft messages for branding and promoting Goodwill Hunting.

Blog Site and Social Media Account

The blog’s webpage was designed on the popular cloud-based web development platform www.wix.com. I chose to design and published the blog on Wix because their platform allowed for more creative range with the customization of templates. Wix has an advance editor tool that allows me to drag and drop any element in the blog’s design in order for it to look exactly the way I want. Wix also allows you to optimize your site to

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look great on any device, which was extremely helpful because I was driving users from a social media account that is commonly utilized via a smart phone. I paid for the domain rights of www.goodwillhunting.com as well as a monthly premium subscription that offered me 10GB of storage which was really useful because a lot of our content was high quality photographs.

Smilansky (2015) informed us of how important it is to use social media sites like Instagram to communicate your brand. He highlighted Instagram specifically when working with brands that possess high visual quality. Since a huge part of our content revolved around the photographs we took, launching the Instagram account was an important piece to the puzzle. The blog and the Instagram account were both launched on September 3rd, 2017. At this point, I reflected upon what Knapp (2000) challenged us to think about in our brand communication process. He discussed thinking about brand communication as a blueprint for making sure to select the proper communication strategies at strategic times to maximize success. So with the blog and the Instagram account created, we began the process of communicating Goodwill Hunting's brand.

Mullaney's main goal was to use the blog to tell her fashion story and contribute to the societal fashion narrative. My main goal was to take these efforts and help her establish a brand identity. I communicated the brand consistently and cohesively in an organized fashion, which included editing blog content to fit a cohesive message and promoting the blog with multiple messages that communicated the blog's brand to stakeholders.

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Creating a Message

Mullaney and I understood what Goodwill Hunting was going to stand for, because we understood how her narrative was different from the dominant fashion narrative today. Clearly, there is a certain degree of unattainability that attaches itself to the fashion industry; it is all about what label you can afford and how you can delicately brag about your ostentatious life style. Mullaney's approach to fashion represented a key element when developing a brand for the blog. The blog was centered on the thrift adventures of a regular college student, working a typical minimum wage job at Panera, who was also a huge fan of fashion and is able to keep up with trends because of her thrifting. This message is relatable, and for some consumers, it was familiar. So when it came to branding and message strategy, being a fashion blogger on a budget, made her different. It became one of her "added values" (Jones, 1986).

I created and designed the blog site for Goodwill Hunting and took all the photographs that populated the page. I was intentional and strategic with the blog's design and how I edited content so that the messages were consistent with the brand. I implemented public relations strategy as soon as the first blog post was published because every message and image that was posted on the blog was working towards building a cohesive brand identity. The first half of the public relations strategy included branding Goodwill Hunting and establishing the brand as authentic. Then the second half was all about promoting Goodwill Hunting and communicating that authenticity through the display of the brand.

Branding the Blog

I broke down the branding process into two halves. The first half focused on establishing a brand for “Goodwill Hunting.” No one knew about the blog’s efforts or anything about the blogger, so the main goal was to center communication around introduction. I introduced Mullaney’s likes, dislikes, particular fashion trends, favorite places to thrift, and her lifestyle. “Consumers and other stakeholders evaluate organizational claims and promises against its actions and behavior to form perceptions of authenticity” (Molleda & Jain, 2013, p.436). So in writing the first few blog posts, the blog made its claims on what it liked and what it did not like. The blog remained consistent with those initial core values and this allowed “Goodwill Hunting,” and the blogger, to be perceived as authentic. Goodwill Hunting blog posts in the first months were instrumental to introducing the blogger’s likes and dislikes. These post gave insight into who Mullaney was through her thrifting adventures so readers could begin to identify with her messages. Navarro-Bailon (2012) discussed how cohesive and consistent messages help consumers understand what a brand stands for. These first posts remained consistent with displaying Mullaney’s love for thrift shopping, her love for a ‘do-it-yourself’ project, and her dislike for paying full price for items at department stores.

There were several ways in which we consistently communicated Mullaney’s love for thrifting especially in the first months. These excerpts from the blog are representations of Mullaney’s taste being established and set out to establish the brand, what it stands for, and what values the blog needed to adhere to in order to be perceived

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as authentic. A communication tactic that we believed communicated the brand well was our 'Pro-tips.' Each blog post ended with a thrifting 'Pro-tip' that gave readers who may not thrift a lot, some advice from Mullaney who thrifts very often. We believe this tactic really authenticated Mullaney because it showcased her knowledge of thrifting, and served as proof of how long she had been thrifting. The following are examples of 'pro-tips' included in the blog's post.

"PRO TIP: Sometimes places like Plato's Closet lack the knowledge of certain brands and they end up selling them extremely cheap. This creates a business for you, figure out what the piece is worth and sell it to a friend or on Etsy. Take advantage of the 90's coming back into style and search for those old Calvin's or Tommy jeans. To be a thrifter you don't have to clean your closet of all of those items you love and paid too much for. Thrifting is hard sometimes and when you are looking for something specific it can be impossible, malls are acceptable just not favorable".

"PRO TIP: Give thrifting a chance, it isn't weird to wear clothes that once belonged to someone else, it isn't gross. Nowadays retail stores are selling clothes that look like they have been through hell and back, and they're selling those items for a crazy amount. Go to your local Goodwill and buy some basic pieces that will compliment your expensive shoes. I promise if you thrift once you will never look at retail stores the same. Don't pack your skirts up yet, throw some tights under your short skirts and trade your sandals for boots. Your favorite skirt doesn't have to hide away for eight months of the year!"

"PRO TIP: As someone who enjoys a wide variety of the color black, lol, I definitely love when it gets colder I have the opportunity to hunt for layers that can add some type of color to my closet. One of the biggest hunting tips I can give you is as soon as you walk into Goodwill, listen for discount tag of the day. Goodwill items are color tagged and they usually give discounts on the color of the day. Going shopping during the fall provide a great opportunity for you to get quality sweaters for half off the already low price. Sometimes you end up leaving Goodwill with a quality sweater or jacket for only \$2!"

"PRO TIP: I think one of my biggest thrifting tips is not to be set on a specific outfit or look you're trying to put together. You're going to find yourself frustrated not being able to find the perfect bottoms or the perfect top to go with your outfit. This isn't like shopping at a department store where you can simply ask them if they have it in this size or color. Walking into Goodwill with an open mind and \$5 is pretty much a perfect start lol. Then when you make thrifting a lifestyle you find yourself being really excited like I was when I found this sweater and shoes and realized I had a whole Audrey Hepburn inspired look I could pull off! A huge part of thrifting is the hunt and getting inspired when you can match your finds with items already in your closet!"

In order for us to reinforce this idea that Mullaney was savvy shopper on a budget, we thought it imperative to include the prices of her thrifted items. Because most

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of these items were below \$6.00, we found that our followers and readers were extremely impressed with the quality of the clothing for the price. We immediately took advantage of this appeal and remained consistent with attaching the prices to all the blog post. The following are examples of how the blog included prices in the post to reinforce

Mullaney's love for thrifting:

"This outfit is Goodwill from head to toe. The black sweater polo neck sweater was \$4, the black stone washed jeans were \$5 and these slip-ons that are surely becoming a favorite of mine were \$6."

"This dress cost \$4 dollars at Goodwill, and the feeling of pulling off a dress backwards was priceless haha."

"My jeans were \$5, my top was \$4 (and of course a couple sizes bigger), and my shoes were my slip-ons from my Audrey inspired look for \$6 (ALL FROM GOODWILL!)"

"Here is the breakdown- My beige patterned top was \$6 from Goodwill, and these shorts that you now see, were once long jeans that were only \$4 from Goodwill."

A part of Mullaney's thrift practice is her ability to find outfits at thrift stores and turn them into something different. This 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) trend was something we observed other thrift bloggers were keen on telling stories about and was quite prominent in the thrifting community. Since Mullaney was really good at these DIY projects, and her narratives about her DIY items were usually centered on how she made an expensive look out of cheaper items, this directly reinforced the thrifting brand we were creating. The stories of Mullaney's DIY projects authenticated her as a fashion blogger on budget. The following are examples of how we stayed consistent with the messages about

Mullaney's DIY practice:

"Once I got home I got my scissors out and decided to make them a little more age appropriate. I always cut my shorts at an angle UNLESS I want to have a folded cuff look to the bottom, in that case I just cut them wherever and start rolling them up. I cut one side and then fold one half over the other so they are even."

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“These high waisted shorts were once high waisted jeans at my local Goodwill that is until I took some scissors to them. I really like the rolled up look when it comes to high waisted shorts and if you have slightly thick thighs like I do it makes for a more comfortable fit. When I know I’m just going to roll my jeans I cut them sloppy and typically a couple inches above the knee and then just roll.”

“The high waisted skirt I am wearing is black with small flowers scattered around it. Typically, I wouldn’t have bought this skirt but my original idea with it was to do a DIY and turn it into a shirt”

“I also found the tank top at Goodwill but in good ole’ Elynn fashion I had a DIY session to make it into a crop top. As you can see it isn’t the cleanest cut but I actually really like how the choppy cut adds to the overall aesthetic of the outfit.”

Our last tactic that we believed established and reinforced the brand of Goodwill Hunting was Mullaney’s personal narratives about paying full price for items at department stores. In order to authenticate Mullaney as a thrifty blogger, we had to find subtle ways to talk about her dislike for paying a lot of money for clothes at main stream department stores. The following are examples of how we displayed Mullaney’s dislike for paying full prices at department stores in order to reinforce the brand of Goodwill

Hunting:

“Typically I wouldn’t step foot into a department store, those places are covered in designer clothes that my minimum wage budget couldn’t support; but a gift card for your birthday is truly the gift that keeps on giving.”

“Once upon a time I, Elynn Mullaney went to the deep dark depths of a MALL! Why? Because it was last minute, and I was in a city with limited selection of thrified formal wear.”

“Once again, everything that I am wearing is from Goodwill, because I refused to simply go and pick up this trend from a department store and not thrift it first.”

The strategy of introducing Mullaney’s likes and dislikes were imperative to the branding process. Crafting messages on the blog that told stories of her love for thrifting through thrifting tips, DIY stories, an emphasis on low prices and a disdain for paying full price reinforced the brand we were establishing. Another important public relations activities in this campaign was taking the photographs that populated the blog. As

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important as it was to have quality written content on Goodwill Hunting, it was equally as important to have an aesthetically appealing website and Instagram page. Mullaney's goal was to add to the fashion narrative in a way that challenged the current ostentatious face of fashion blogging. The brand of Goodwill Hunting resonates with thrifty readers who more than likely are not living a lifestyle of unattainable opulence. The photos that we took and the backgrounds that we chose needed to reinforce that brand. It would not make sense if Mullaney was preaching about how to penny pinch on clothing, but the backgrounds in her photos portrayed an unattainable life style in Beverly Hills. We wanted to take a very natural approach to most of the photos, picking locations that were free to use and made Mullaney seem as relatable as possible. Most of the photos on Goodwill Hunting feature natural backdrops, as well as Mullaney walking down the streets of very small towns to reinforce the idea that she is living a normal life. It was important for us to take these photographs with this theme because most fashion bloggers have their photos taken at exclusive events in areas that are expensive to live in. We utilized these small towns and natural backdrops to represent Mullaney's lifestyle. Figures one - twelve display how the photographs taken for the blog employed this natural small town theme look in order to communicate the brand.

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Figure one



Figure two



Figure three



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Figure four



Figure five



Figure six



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Figure seven



Figure eight



Figure nine



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Figure 10

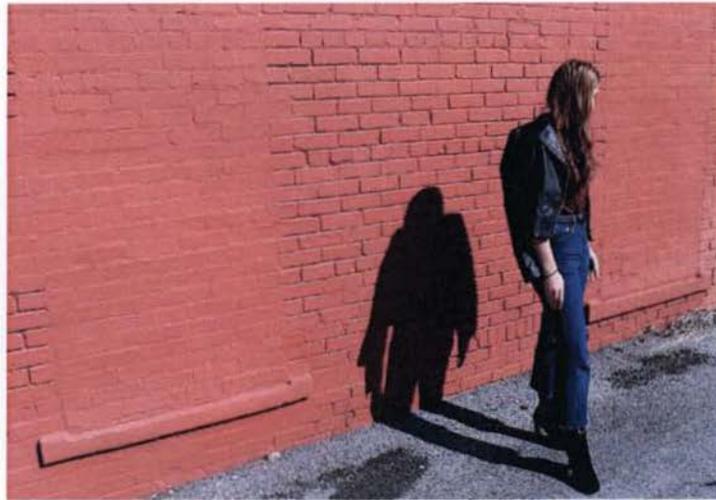


Figure eleven



Figure twelve



Promoting the blog was also a huge branding tool as well. We made sure that our creative efforts in our promotion served to communicate the brand identity we were establishing. We took our time to take these photographs that communicated our brand, so our next step was to use this curated content to promote the blog in an effective and consistent way.

Promoting the Blog

Our first experience with any type of cross promotion was when the account “statusapp” reached out to us and asked us to give their app a review. In return they would promote one of our posts on their social media account with over eleven thousand followers. The account identified itself with all fashion enthusiasts and it really was a great opportunity to drive readers to the blog even if they did not follow the Instagram account. The individual post promoting our account received two-hundred and eleven likes and the amount of readers Goodwill Hunting had spiked that particular day. That is when we realized that cross promotion, regardless of whether or not we gained a ton of followers on the account, was how we could drive visitors to at least click on the blog through the Instagram.

There were two specific aspects of the campaign that really allowed Goodwill Hunting to be successful in regards to readership-The Instagram “pod” that the account was a part of, and the decision to start using hashtags that directly engaged accounts that identified with the thrifting brand. When the Instagram account started using hashtags

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like #thrifty and #goodwillfinds, the intentionality of our following increased. We had all the major Goodwill industry accounts following the Instagram page, and a lot of major bloggers that identified with the thrifting brand noticed and followed the page. The Instagram account was also in what was called a “pod,” which is a group of other similar accounts interacting and building relationships with one another to publicly display support of each other’s efforts. This was perfect for Goodwill Hunting, because the account was in a pod where all the users had thousands of followers, with one user, “theballeronabudget,” who was named seventeenth on the list of top fifty budget fashion bloggers on www.blog.feedspot.com and had over twenty-six thousand followers. Over a period of four and a half months, Goodwill Hunting produced thrifty-five blog posts and sixty Instagram post. The Instagram account gained a total of three-hundred and ninety followers and the blog gained one-thousand one-hundred and eighty-five page views among two-hundred and eighty-seven readers.

It was also important that we created content that reinforced the brand and helped us develop relationships with important audiences. Morton (2012) talked about the power of social media as a branding tool, whether purposefully cultivated or not, and this is an example of it being purposefully cultivated. So the relationships we built through our social media account were an important driving force in promoting the blog. Mullaney and I sat down numerous times to create a list of established fashion bloggers that we felt were able to relate to the blog’s brand. When the blog was published, we started reaching out to these bloggers to open the door for collaborations. Our main goal was to introduce Mullaney and have her name validated by already established bloggers. But central to our

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strategy was the relationship building aspect; as Cayzer (2004) taught us that blogging's greatest benefit is social.

It was extremely important to cultivate the relationships with bloggers in the thrifting community because it helped us increase our readership. One of the "rules" of the Instagram pod account was that every time a user in the group would post anything, all the other users would have to comment and like their post. This generated buzz for Goodwill Hunting because we were seen interacting with accounts that had thousands of followers and were already established in that community. Cross promotion with these bloggers translated directly into increase readership for Goodwill Hunting. The figures below display how these bloggers promoted Goodwill Hunting on their own platform, as well as interacted with the blog to increase awareness of our account and its perceived authenticity. Figures thirteen - sixteen showcase different bloggers from the Instagram pod featuring Goodwill Hunting on their platform and figure seventeen showcases how Goodwill Hunting promoted these bloggers on its platform.

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Figure thirteen



Figure fourteen



Figure fifteen



Figure sixteen



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Figure seventeen

Favorite Thrift Style Bloggers .ATM!
December 3, 2017



I think one of the coolest things about sharing your passions on any platform is having the opportunity to network and connect with other people who also value the same things you value. I think it's so cool that everyone shares their own life fashion diary.

0 100



I think one of the coolest things about sharing your passions on any platform is having the opportunity to network and connect with other people who also value the same things you value. I think it's so cool that everyone shares their own life fashion diary, and we're able to support and be inspired by each other's content. So in the spirit of the holidays, here's my gift to you. Here are my favorite thrift style fashion bloggers at the moment, and I hope these women are able to inspire you the way they have inspired me! (click the photo to view their content!) Happy Hunting!

Evaluation

The success of Goodwill Hunting was measured in various ways. One of them was looking at statistics; using Google Analytics to track page views and sessions to see if those increased based on the public relations tactics I was employing. I also judged the blog's success based on how well I consistently and cohesively communicated messages that reinforced the brand's identity. So I looked at frequency of post, consistency of messages, and even consistency of image style. I also judged the blog's success based on how intentional my following and responses were; if I was receiving positive feedback from entities within the thrifting community then I knew my brand was being communicated well. Lastly, I judged the success of Goodwill Hunting through social media activity I analyzed how I was promoting the blog on social media and if the followers were increasing and interacting with the account. Was the account receiving

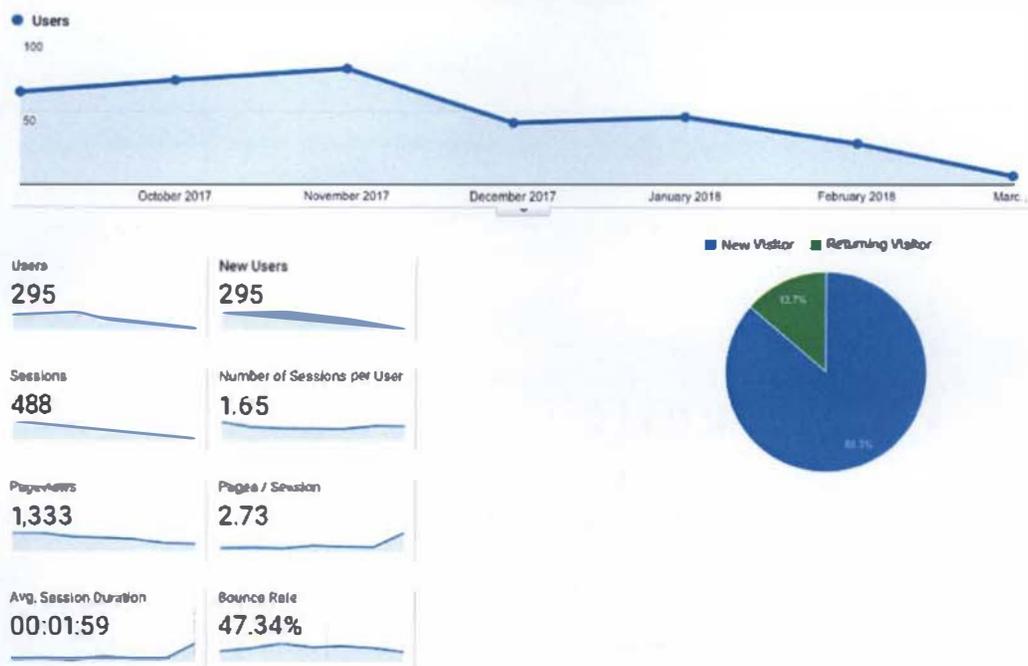
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comments that demonstrated the audience perceived the brand as authentic? Were the comments positive? Was the account being recognized by other fashion accounts that identified with its content? These measures really allowed me to prioritize my campaign in a way where I knew which outcome would have the greater impact for my client

Google analytics was the primary evaluation tool used to track the audience's interaction with Goodwill Hunting. Figure 18 breaks down audience overview for Goodwill Hunting between the months of September and March. In total, the blog's pages were viewed 1,333 times by 295 users in 488 sessions. The average session duration was 1 minute and 59 seconds. Users represent anyone who has initiated interaction with the blog's content and views represent the total number of pages viewed including repeated views of a single page; every Blog post on Goodwill Hunting represented a page. When we analyze sessions we are looking at the period of time that a user is actively engaged with the blog's content; all user activity is associated with a session. If we take a look at the pie chart in Figure eighteen, we also see the ratio of new visitors to returning visitors: 13.7% (47) of our 295 users were returning readers.

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Figure eighteen



When the social media account and blog was initially published, the Instagram account and the blog had a spike in viewing and following. The novelty of the project and the visual appeal of the blog's design had piqued the interest of the fashion community on Instagram. Regardless of the blog not gaining an insane amount of followers, readers were still being driven to the blog by visiting the social media account, being intrigued, and clicking the link in the account's bio. Within the first week, the blog gained over one hundred page views between only four posts. We were attracting viewers with vibrant quality photographs, and an aesthetically appealing blog design. In the beginning, we really focused on being as visually captivating as possible to attract viewers, but really focus on establishing our brand through the content. Each blog post was consistent with the overall thrifting/ budget savvy brand and had really interesting narratives behind them.

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Goodwill Hunting saw an increase in readership in the months of October and November largely due to the public relations tactics employed in the first months. October saw 71 active users and the blog's readership peaked at 79 active users for the month November. These were also the months that we began to be intentional with our hashtag usage and our following. Figure nineteen shows how we began using hashtags like #goodwillfinds, #thriftstorefinds, and #thriftshopping to increase visibility in the thrifting community and reinforce our brand with every new Instagram post. This practice proved successful because, as you can see from figure twenty, all the major Goodwill Instagram accounts across the country began to follow our social media page. And of course with these major accounts following us that are directly related to our brand, whenever they would like or comment on a post it placed us in the explore pages of other Instagram accounts that identified with the brand of Goodwill Hunting. From the moment the social media account went live in September of 2017 to January 2018 the Instagram account gained roughly 100 followers a month. Figure twenty-one displays the Instagram account with a following of 390 followers. Though 390 followers may not sound like a lot, we focused more on the intentionality of our followers. With several Goodwill industries and thrift bloggers following us, the content that we were creating had an impact, and the interaction with our content was ample and positive. We made sure that we created a following interested in our content.

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Our brand communication received a number of positive responses that validated our efforts. Figure twenty-two is an email that Goodwill Hunting received from Adrienne Poole, the Marketing Coordinator at The Goodwill Industries of Kentucky. Poole opened up by thanking us for supporting Goodwill's mission and sharing our personal narrative. She asked that we joined "The Good Life" team and consistently post blog content for their platform. This offer was a huge indicator that our efforts to communicate the brand of Goodwill Hunting was successful. Mainly because Poole believed that we were aiding in supporting the mission of Goodwill and believed that the messages we were creating would benefit their organization if we produced blog content for them.

Figure twenty-two

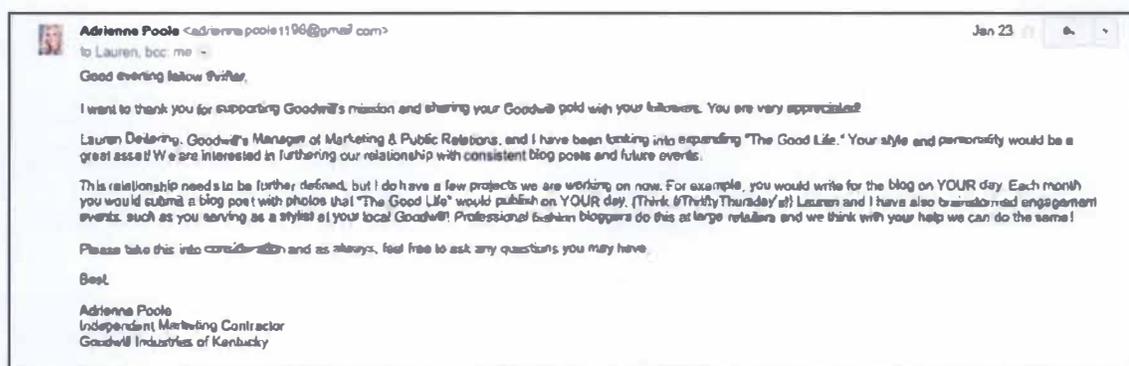


Figure twenty-three displays another response we received via Instagram. User Kayyemmaa reached out to us saying that her mother is the current COO of The Goodwill Industries and wanted us to provide content for their USA website. This again was another validating point that our efforts were being well received and our brand was being communicated clearly enough for these entities to reach out to us. Figure twenty-four is an example of the daily feedback we received from our followers commenting on our Instagram post validating our messages and identifying with them. This played a key

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role in our public relations strategy because with followers constantly responding to our messages we were being perceived as authentic by our audience.

Figure twenty-three



Figure twenty-four



Conclusion

Mullaney's efforts were centered on creating content that added to the fashion narrative in a different way. Fashion blogging today is often a display of opulence and a story of unattainability. However, Mullaney's story and the heart of Goodwill Hunting, challenge that system completely. Mullaney's thrifting, penny pitching, and constant stories about her need to save money through her thrifting practice constituted the brand of Goodwill Hunting. This created what Jones (1998) would call the "added value" of the brand and what distinguished Goodwill Hunting from other fashion blogs. This campaign reflected upon how when all public relations activities serve to consistently and cohesively communicate a brand, it results in a well-established brand identity that an

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audience supports and identifies with. Throughout this campaign the brand of Goodwill Hunting was communicated consistently through the messages that were crafted on the blog, the photographs that were taken, and the consistency of the social media account. Because of this cohesive brand communication, Goodwill Hunting was offered the opportunity to provide content for “The Good life” - the blogging platform for the Goodwill Industries of Kentucky, and also the opportunity to write for the official Goodwill Industries of America website. Goodwill Hunting also gained 295 readers on the blog’s website, 390 followers on our Instagram account, as well as several collaborations with well-established bloggers.

It was important for us to communicate the brand of Goodwill Hunting strategically so that the brand would be perceived as authentic. Molleda and Jane (2013) argue that the key to being perceived as authentic by your consumers is to remain consistent with the core values you claim as important in the beginning of your endeavor. Goodwill Hunting proved to do just that. Our public relations strategy was broken down into two halves where the first focused on introducing those core values, and the second focused on remaining consistent and reiterating those values. Goodwill Hunting stayed true to the brand it initially crafted and the consumers’ belief in our authenticity was displayed and validated through their interaction with our content.

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