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Follow Me: Building an Online Brand

Natalie Kelley '18
Linfield College

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Building an online brand

Kellie Bowen '18 scrolls methodically through Facebook on a recent afternoon, Judas Priest screaming through her ear buds. The British band hooked her on heavy metal at age 10, the first time she heard the insistent thump of the bass, howl of the electric guitar and operatic singing of front man Rob Halford.

What do you do when you have a deep passion, like Bowen developed for metal? For Bowen, and others in today's always-on, instantly connected digital world, the choice seemed obvious – create an online platform, connect with like-minded metalheads and motivate others along the way.

So Bowen began a blog, *Metalhead's Commentary*, in 2016.

"I've always wanted to be a rock journalist and I've loved heavy metal since I was a kid," said Bowen, a mass communication and art double major. "Every time I talk to someone about heavy metal, I can go on for days. So instead of chewing someone's ear off, I started to write and post about it."

It really is that simple.

Anyone with an interest can find a vacant lot in the digital world to create a presence through blogging, vlogging, Instagramming, podcasting or other means. The platforms, constantly evolving, have become increasingly popular and

changed media for the better, says Susan Currie Sivek, associate professor of mass communication at Linfield. She says the personal platforms add value to the digital world because there is a wider variety of ideas shared to a broad audience. Everyone can find their niche and share their passion.

"They also give opportunity to people who may not find a voice in mainstream media to get their ideas out without having millions of dollars in investments or a literary agent or any of the traditional means of reaching an audience," says Sivek.

But if you want to build an audience for your work, research and planning is key. Sivek advises spending time in the online community around the topic before plunging in to create content yourself.

"There are already conversations going on in those communities, and conventions to be aware of," says Sivek, who teaches social media classes. "It's also important to have some sort of strategy. If you want to have a more serious online presence or potentially make money from your work online, you really need to think about what you bring to that online conversation that maybe nobody else can."

Kellie Bowen '18, began a blog, *Metalhead's Commentary*, to connect with like-minded rock music enthusiasts and motivate others at the same time.



In the realm of heavy-metal voices, Bowen stands out by organizing her blog like a traditional magazine, including opinion pieces, news and departments, rather than just the typical music reviews often found on other websites.

Authenticity carries a lot of weight in the digital world, also. Alexis Michael '17, a vlogger, and Christina Rice, a Los Angeles-based blogger and podcaster, say strategy is important but should never get in the way of just being yourself.

“Stay authentic and do not worry about what anyone else is doing,” says Rice, creator of the *Addicted to Lovely* blog and *Actually Adultish* podcast. “As long as you stay true to yourself, like-minded people will find you and enjoy the content. You won’t make a real community unless you’re being completely real.”

That’s not an easy tightrope to walk if you’re making money on your platform, which means accepting advertising or payment to promote particular products. Rice says she stays genuine by only promoting companies she believes in. Your audience will quickly figure out if you aren’t offering truthful recommendations, she says.

Michael, a Younique makeup presenter and beauty vlogger, graduated in May with a degree in mass communication and marketing. She says being genuine online creates vulnerability, and ultimately deeper connections with her audience.

“My followers not only relate to me, but we form deeper relationships,” she says. “My actions online are constantly watched and observed,” and those who listen to her vlog appreciate getting her thoughts and feelings unfiltered.

Michael says features like live video streaming on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, with an in-the-moment feel and lack of polish and editing, have given her the opportunity to be even more genuine with followers.

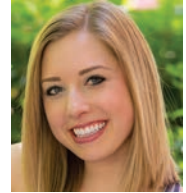
The bottom line is that it’s increasingly easy – at least in terms of technology and platform – to create an online presence that fits you, your interests and your passions. The trick is knowing what you want to say, and spending the time to say it well. With thousands of bloggers, vloggers, Instagrammers and podcasters vying for attention in the digital world (and more jumping online every day), your unique perspective is the key to success.

That, and maybe a little electric guitar.

– Natalie Kelley '18

A word from *Blonde Gone Clean*

In 2015, I found my passion for fitness, nutrition and all things wellness deepening at a rapid pace, sparked by my newfound love of long-distance running.



I began running seriously my freshman year as a way to grieve after the death of Parker Moore '17, a friend and classmate who was killed during the fall of 2014. I ran my first half marathon and there was no turning back. After weeks of styling my food, creating recipes and snapping photos to show my mom, I realized I needed to express myself in a bigger way. That was when my blog, *Blonde Gone Clean*, was born.

It started as a hobby – a fun pastime on the weekends and a place to channel positive energy. Now, *Blonde Gone Clean* is who I am to my core. The more I develop recipes, pour out my heart and try to inspire others, the more my life and blog intertwine.

Looking back, I realize my blog has grown into far more than I intended. It has become a personal brand, an online identity, a supportive community and an irreplaceable part of who I am. It has provided me with opportunities to travel to conferences and connect with companies, helped me create real and deep friendships, and shaped the career and life I intend to pursue after graduation.

Before starting, I was unsure about my future career. I started at Linfield as a marketing major, but wasn’t passionate about my business classes. Once I began my blog, everything became more clear. I realized my dream career is strategic advertising or public relations for a company that is focused on health and wellness. My experience creating my own online identity makes me want to help others refine theirs as well.

– Natalie Kelley '18

blondegoneclean.com