The Age of the Advertorial: Incorporating Sponsored Content into the Newsroom

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THE AGE OF THE ADVERTORIAL:
INCORPORATING SPONSORED CONTENT INTO THE NEWSROOM

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts
with Mahurin Honors College Distinction at
Western Kentucky University

By
Hayley N. Robb
May 2020

*****

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ABSTRACT

During a time when news is fast, frequent and easier to find than ever, it has become harder for news outlets to not only generate revenue but to establish a need with their readers. Sponsored content pieces, also referred to as native advertising, have offered creative solutions to this problem for student media groups and professional news outlets across the country.

Using WKU’s first-ever content agency, Cherry Creative, as a case study and by analyzing various other news outlets in the U.S., this project aims to develop a series of recommendations for the future of Cherry Creative and student media, at large.

The qualitative approach used for this project used methods ranging from phone interviews with professional news outlets to video chats with creative directors, and advertising managers at student media. Peer reviewed journals were also referenced for trends in sponsored content today. Many publications refused taking part in the study because it was being published, excluding much insight and influential brands in the industry.

The results benefitted WKU Student Publications and presented future journalism students with alternative career options. This project also addresses ethical concerns of professionals in the field when considering the combination of editorial content and advertising.

Keywords: native advertising, sponsored content, paid post, journalism, student media
I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kevin and Judy Robb, who are my biggest supporters. I also dedicate this work to the two places I got to call home during my time on the Hill — WKU Student Publications and the Preston Health & Activities Center. Both organizations allowed me to apply what I had learned in the classroom to real-world experiences preparing me for the next phase in my life.
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I also want to thank Sam Oldenburg and Mac McKerral for their help not only on this project but throughout my time at WKU. I would not have survived without their support and constant replies to my frantic emails and messages at all hours of the night. I’d also like to thank the rest of WKU Student Publications staff as well as the Campus Recreation & Wellness department on campus. Both of these organizations served as my home away from home while in Bowling Green, and I could not be more thankful for the forever family I gained in each. This project would also not be possible without the gracious donation from the Paul and Ellen Schuhmann Student Publications Scholarship Fund.

Thank you to everyone.
VITA

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PRESENTATIONS

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PART I: AN EXPOSITORY REVIEW
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO SPONSORED CONTENT

Whether it’s scrolling through the future of air travel or reading through 14 cringeworthy high school moments, the content was brought to you by an advertiser (“Welcome to the Airport of the Future!”, n.d.; “14 Cringeworthy High School Moments Everyone Has Experienced”, 2015). Native advertising, also referred to as sponsored content, paid content and branded content, doesn’t have a concrete definition. However, most interpretations recognize the new storytelling format as a hybrid mix of editorial content and promotional content published as “embedded advertising” or that which takes the shape of its environment, whether that be digital or print publications (Matteo & Zotto, 2015, p. 176). This means the advertisement is placed in a print publication or on a website while attempting not to disturb the user’s experience. Native advertising tries to marry the advertisement with the brand of the publication to make the ad more engaging than traditional advertising (Matteo & Zotto, 2015, p. 176). For this reason, most native advertising has emerged by casting itself as an effective means for consumer engagement and a solution for newsrooms as advertising revenue and circulation declines (Matteo & Zotto, 2015, p. 170; Casale, 2015, p. 130; Ponikvar, 2015, p. 1191).

In an effort to reverse the trend in declining revenue, Western Kentucky University’s Office of Student Publications created a branded content studio in 2018 called Cherry Creative. It focuses entirely on sponsored content. The agency works with
clients on campus and throughout the community to help them tell their stories through published stories in the College Heights Herald and Talisman magazine.

Cherry Creative generated more than $80,000 in its first year, garnering most of that revenue from View of the Hill, a fall orientation guide sent to incoming freshman at WKU, and a special housing section inserted into the WKU Herald newspapers in conjunction with the first-ever Housing Fair. In the housing section, apartment complexes throughout Bowling Green bought content packages to be involved in the spring event. Although native advertising and sponsored content is new to WKU Student Publications, it has been modeling much of what it does based on what is being done by schools and professional news outlets like the New York Times’s T Brand Studio, which lives within the New York Times family of companies.

Cherry Creative consists of about 20 people with a leadership team of five — a creative director, writing editor, design editor, photo editor and as of fall 2019, a video coordinator, an effort to offer more video services to clients. The writing and photo teams consist of about ten students total, three designers and one videographer. Cherry Creative is assisted by the advertising manager and advertising representatives, who also sell advertising for both the WKU Herald and Talisman. Cherry Creative and the advertising staff are assisted by two advisers, Samual Oldenburg and Will Hoagland.

In addition to the video coordinator position, Cherry Creative has made improvements since last year to create more revenue for WKU Student Publications. One example is a partnership with Amazon, enabling Cherry Creative to earn commissions on any sales based on lists created for the Talisman website. Cherry Creative also hopes to
sell advertisements in a digital “Graduate Gallery” to parents, guardians or family members who have a student graduating in spring 2020.

Cherry Creative is the merging of marketing and journalism. Its clients range in size from corporate sponsors like McDonald’s to local businesses such as Nat’s Outdoor Sports. Each year has brought more enthusiasm from clients in the area and new services offered. In its second year, Cherry Creative introduced video to the spring “Housing Guide,” generating more than $1,000 that wouldn’t have resulted otherwise.

However, native advertising is not welcomed by everyone in the community and newsroom.

Although some argue it brings consumers content they actually want to read and revenue to the publication, some see native advertising as deceptive and “blurring” the line between advertising and editorial (Ponikvar, 2015, p. 1188). Baldasty (1992) argues these boundaries were established long ago when the “Penny Press” changed from a politically oriented press to a commercial-minded business (as cited in Schudson, 1994, p. 269). The “Penny Press” revolutionized newspapers in the 1830s and 40s by creating a medium that was cheap to the public, independent of political parties and technologically savvy through advancements like the telegraph and introducing advertising as a form of revenue (Nerone, 1987, p. 378). In the later nineteenth century, the “Penny Press” moved more toward the consumer directing content to specific groups like women, touching on topics ranging from sports to fashion to recipes (Baldasty, 1992). It was then that publishers realized profits could be made off of the advertisements they placed in newspapers (Schauster et. al, 2016, p. 1410). However, many people wondered if journalists could uphold their mission of sustaining democracy while under the influence
of advertising (Schauster, Ferrucci & Neill, 2016, p. 1410). Some publications have placed a literal wall between the two entities attempting to keep the news organizations viable and removed from capital influence when reporting the news (Kaye & Quinn, 2010, p. 127; Baker 1994).

Cherry Creative shares an office with the WKU Herald and Talisman and allows employees to work on either the WKU Herald or Talisman, but not both. Students can also take advantage of any other outside publication if they choose. Although this risks some conflict of interest when reporting on stories, it allows WKU Student Publications to have at least some oversight on any potential issues by limiting it to two publications. WKU Student Publications wants students to be able to take advantage of as much professional experience as they can while in college to prepare them for their first career.

With technology advancing, the debate over native advertising becomes more complex, relying on guidelines and precedents set by the federal courts protecting the press and speech — including speech for commercial purposes. An analysis of the shift in U.S. Supreme Court interpretations of the First Amendment and its protection of commercial speech reveals the wall between the newsroom and advertising continues to crumble as news-side operations becomes more reliant on advertising. Chapter 2 will analyze how the protection of commercial speech has allowed for this new form of storytelling intermingled with news.
Figure 1.1 Cherry Creative sponsored content listicle. From “Five things to do over fall break” by Cherry Creative, 2019. Retrieved from https://wkuherald.com/life/five-things-to-do-over-fall-break/article_e2a42ae4-e6c9-11e9-8176-133350877c91.html.
CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF SPONSORED CONTENT

According to a 2019 eMarketer report, the native advertising share of U.S. digital advertisement spending was estimated to total 64.8% by 2020, a number that has continued to climb since 2016 (Perrin, 2019). ADYOULIKE, a leading in-feed native advertising technology company, reports native advertising spending is expected to increase by 372% in five years, which will take the native advertising industry’s global value from $82.83 billion in 2020 to $402 billion by 2025 (ADYOULIKE, 2019).

Success of this new storytelling format is partly due to the consumer movement online. Native advertising has always been around, it’s just the methods have changed.

During the 1950s, native advertising came to television and radio shows by placing brand names in the titles of programs (Hagerty, 2009, p. 148). Television followed radio’s lead by placing sponsor names in the title of their programs, such as “Texaco Star Theater” and “Kraft Television Theatre” (Hagerty, 2009, p. 148). Although product placement may not seem exactly the same as printed articles or digital experiences seen on the T Brand Studio website, both have the same goal. These media companies are using their audience to leverage another brand, which allows publications to team up with even larger companies bringing in more advertising dollars.

More contemporary examples of this form of “embedded advertising” would be Hagerty’s (2009) example of Extreme Home Makeover featuring various products from Roebuck and Company, colloquially known as Sears, on its show or Netflix partnering with T Brand Studio to produce a digital package complete with infographics, videos and
writing to tell their story. The goal of both examples though remains the same — to get the consumer to buy or use the product or service.

In response to the rise of native advertising on screen, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) created regulations similar to those set in place for digital entities today, called the “Sponsorship Identification Rules” (Hagerty, 2009, p. 148). Since the media company was using a brand’s mission for commercial purposes, the FCC claimed it was the “public’s right to know” who was paying for the television program (Hagerty, 2009, p.148). Section 317 of the Communications Act of 1934 created new regulations requiring broadcasters to make sponsorship known and report any “money, service, or other valuable consideration” (as cited in Hagerty, 2009, p. 148). This regulation put in place guidelines for the courts to consider when deciding the first commercial speech case of 1942. The courts must also consider whether commercial speech cases can rest on the “public’s right to know” as regular prior restraint cases cannot.

There is still debate whether or not sponsored content on television should be regulated with critics using similar arguments as those opposed to native advertising in the newsroom. Opponents to native advertising on television claim the act is deceiving the viewers watching it, while others claim to regulate it would be to violate one’s First Amendment rights (Hagerty, 2009, p. 150).

Today, native advertising’s total worth is about 40% of the U.S. T.V advertising market, which proves native advertising is on the rise and moving to other mediums (Lovell, 2017).
The First Case for Commercial Freedom

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees everyone the same freedoms — to express opinions and ideas without oppression and to publish those ideas through any tangible medium, which includes digital spaces. Throughout history these original values have been tested in the courts. The judicial branch of the U.S. government has consistently reaffirmed the importance of free speech and a free press to a democratic society as well as supported the press in its “watchdog” role over government business (Schauster et. al, 2016). However, court rulings have not always recognized all speech equally. Even after commercial speech was granted protection in the monumental case of Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc. (1976), the ruling came with a few caveats. The Supreme Court failed to give commercial speech full freedom in a subsequent case just two years later (Ohralik v. Ohio State Bar Association, 1978). The Supreme Court decisions made prior to 1969 reveal the consumer’s place in society. Because consumers were not the full focus, their “right to know” was less important to the courts. However, as time would progress, the shift in a consumer-based society led to the eventual welcoming of native advertising in a digital space.

The Initial Hearing

The first major case to address commercial interests and the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment was Valentine v. Chrestensen (1942). To understand the case, one must understand America in 1942. World War II was just starting, thus there was a need to refrain from buying durable goods and encouraging consumption within the advertising industry (An, 2003, p. 4). However, advertisers began to capitalize on the
excess profits tax during the war (An, 2003, p. 4). Excess profits over a given amount were taxed at a rate of 85.5%, and since major U.S. corporations were often near that rate, advertisers tried to convince them to promote their products through trade journals frustrating consumer leaders (An, 2003, p. 4). The consumer movement had its beginning in 1916 with the formation of the National Consumers League, which became a major opponent of the advertising industry in the 40s (An, 2003, p. 4).

A committee member on the Consumer Union’s board became so frustrated with the advertisers they addressed a letter to the Secretary of State asking that the tax deduction for all advertising agencies be denied. The advertisers retaliated by asking for a repeal in advertising journals. Tension between consumers and advertisers set the scene for this case to be decided.

In *Valentine v. Chrestensen* (1942), defendant F.J. Chrestensen owned a former World War I submarine that was docked at a New York City pier where he was also distributing handbills advertising the exhibition of his submarine. New York City police commissioner Valentine informed him that he was violating a city ordinance, which forbade “distribution in the streets of commercial and business advertising matter” (*Valentine v. Chrestensen*, 1942). Valentine told Chrestensen he could only pass out his pamphlets if they included "information or a public protest" (*Valentine v. Chrestensen*, 1942). Chrestensen responded by editing the pamphlets so that they were double faced, removing the admissions fee he included on the first handbill. He also included messaging on the back protesting the City Dock Department’s actions toward his exhibition and their wharfage policies at a city pier, a topic he claimed to be of public interest. Valentine disapproved and said since they still advertised an event, they were
prohibited. Chrestensen continued printing and was restrained. Chrestensen filed suit bringing forth the question of whether or not New York City infringed upon his First Amendment freedom of speech.

Although Chrestensen won in both the District Court and Circuit Court of Appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the injunction and ruled that his leaflets fell outside the First Amendment protections. The Supreme Court in *Valentine v. Chrestensen* (1942) said:

“Handbills, cards and circulars. -- No person shall throw, cast or distribute, or cause or permit to be thrown, cast or distributed, any handbill, circular, card, booklet, placard or other advertising matter whatsoever in or upon any street or public place, or in a front yard or court yard, or on any stoop, or in the vestibule or any hall of any building, or in a letterbox therein; provided that nothing herein contained shall be deemed to prohibit or otherwise regulate the delivery of any such matter by the United States postal service, or prohibit the distribution of sample copies of newspapers regularly sold by the copy or by annual subscription. This section is not intended to prevent the lawful distribution of anything other than commercial and business advertising matter.”

The Supreme Court’s decision was largely criticized by commentators as the justices never truly defined “commercial speech” or gave a reasonable justification for their decision (Farber, 1979, p. 373). Justice Owen J. Roberts wrote, “the Constitution imposes no such restraint on government as respects purely commercial advertising.” *Valentine v. Chrestensen*, (1942). Farber (1979) points out that the ruling goes against the fundamental First Amendment principle of “content neutrality” (p. 373). Later cases such as *Police Department of Chicago v. Mosley* (1972) rest on the First Amendment’s guarantee that “government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content” (as cited in Farber, 1979, p. 374).
The Supreme Court based their decision on Chrestensen’s content and justified it by claiming he had financial motives. Farber (1979) argued content neutrality is a typical issue in commercial speech cases and should be a priority as commercial speech advances (p. 374). Native advertising raises an interesting question when it comes to content neutrality since much of the opposition comes from the content. Whether it is because the advertisement is indistinguishable from editorial content or because the content itself proves biased, the courts will face new challenges as much of the commercial speech cases will concern content neutrality.

Cases after Valentine v. Chrestensen (1942) reaffirm the justices’ rejection of commercial speech freedom, claiming that even door-to-door salesmen could not claim First Amendment rights (Breard v. Alexandria, 1951). Speech with an economic motivation was typically not recognized by the court as protected under the First Amendment (An, 2003, p. 8). However, speech with economic motivations and produced by private means was not automatically struck down in the court of law (An, 2003, p. 8). An (2003) points out n Thornhill v. Alabama (1940) the Court ruled that labor picketing was protected under the First Amendment, of which was a form of economic-concerned speech (p. 8). The case was decided just two years before Valentine v. Chrestensen (1942), in which no reference was made to Thornhill v. Alabama (An, 2003, p. 8). It wasn’t until after Valentine v. Chrestensen (1942) that the court started citing Thornhill v. Alabama (1940) to justify “the First Amendment’s safeguards are not inapplicable to business or economic activity” (Thomas v. Collins, 1945).

Justice Douglas who gave the majority opinion in Valentine v. Chrestensen (1942) would be one of the first justices to start questioning the protection of commercial speech
In Cammarano v. United States (1959) he wrote: “The profit motive should make no difference, for that is an element inherent in the very conception of a press under our system of free enterprise” (as cited in An, 2003, p. 9).

Justice Douglas sparked the sentiment that commercial speech had to be protected if the country was going to operate with a free press and an economic system of which permitted private businesses to operate without state control. His opinion pointed to the fact that the courts were contradicting themselves when dealing with business matters. Disputes on the bench began to surface and Valentine v. Chrestensen (1942) continued to be referenced in dissenting opinions thereafter. It wasn’t until 1964 the Supreme Court would revisit commercial speech with Justice William J. Brennan Jr. coining the term “advertorial” (New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, 1964).

Revisiting Commercial Speech

The New York Times published a piece titled, “Heed Their Rising Voices,” protesting the treatment of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by Alabama law enforcement. The full-page article was a fundraising effort asking readers to send donations in support of Dr. King. Public Safety Commissioner L.B. Sullivan said he took offense to the article by the mention of his subordinates, claiming it reflected badly on him. However, Sullivan was not specifically named anywhere in the advertisement.

Sullivan asked the New York Times to issue a public retraction but the publication denied his request. Sullivan filed for libel claiming defamation and was initially awarded $500,000 by the state of Alabama. The New York Times appealed the decision. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of the publication.
The court ruled Sullivan’s argument was not enough to prove something false and that a public figure had to prove “actual malice,” or that the defendant intended to harm the targeted person (New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, 1964). The larger issue at stake in this case was whether the author’s intent fell into the Supreme Court’s jurisdiction, in which they found it certainly did. Although focused on the libelous words and mistakes of the publisher, New York Times Co. v. Sullivan (1964) brought the hybrid concept of advertising mixed with editorial content to the national stage. The case also addressed the intent of the matter, which is one of the most controversial aspects of native advertising today. Critics claim the intent is to deceive while publishers claim the subtlety is to encourage user engagement. Justice Brennan in New York Times Co. v. Sullivan (1964) wrote:

“The publication here was not a “commercial” advertisement in the sense in which the word was used in Chrestensen. It communicated information, expressed opinion, recited grievances, protested claimed abuses, and sought financial support on behalf of a movement whose existence and objectives are matters of the highest public interest and concern. That the Times was paid for publishing the advertisement is as immaterial in this connection as is the fact that newspapers and books are sold. Any other conclusion would discourage newspapers from carrying “editorial advertisements” of this type, and so might shut off an important outlet for the promulgation of information and ideas by persons who do not themselves have access to publishing facilities – who wish to exercise their freedom of speech even though they are not members of the press. The effect would be to shackle the First Amendment in its attempt to secure “the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources.” To avoid placing such a handicap upon the freedoms of expression, we hold that, if the allegedly libelous statements would otherwise be constitutionally protected from the present judgment, they do not forfeit that protection because they were published in the form of a paid advertisement.”

While Justice Brennan makes the distinction between commercial and public information clear in his statement, he also recognizes advertising as a necessary arm for news-side revenue. Justice Brennan’s opinion alludes to the inevitable coalescence
among advertising and editorial sides of the newsroom, ultimately paving way for the success of sponsored content.

He also addresses those who do not have access to “publishing facilities” and reiterates their freedom to the press. Justice Brennan’s statement basically ensures advertisers and brands are aware of the tools at their disposal, making news publications one of the potential avenues for product exposure, again, showing a form of support for native advertising.

Two years after the *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* (1964) case, the court revisited commercial speech in *Ginzberg v. United States* (1966), in which the court ruled against the inclusion of obscenity in a message but did acknowledge “the commercial activity, in itself is no justification of narrowing the protection of expression,” another signal toward commercial speech freedom (as cited in An, 2003, p. 10-11).

Justice Douglas, Justice Black, Justice John Marshall Harlan and Justice Potter Steward dissented from the majority claiming the techniques used by the advertisers were “pervasive and common,” and therefore, should not be of concern to the First Amendment (An, 2003, p. 11). Justice Douglas’ stance on commercial speech continued to grow stronger as he endorsed the expansion of the First Amendment in many of his dissenting opinions leading into the post-1969 period of commercial speech (*Ginzberg v. United States*, 1966).

**Post-1969 Commercial Speech**

Prior to 1969, the Supreme Court failed to recognize commercial speech as a right guaranteed by the First Amendment. Understanding the socioeconomic context of the time reflects the change that occurred in the court’s interpretation of the First
Amendment. The year 1969 marked the close of a blissful and exciting year in American history. From student protests at Harvard University to the three-day chaos that was the Woodstock Music Festival, the year was marked by vocal unrest and a country divided (Kirkpatrick, 2019).

The year 1969 was also marked by change in American history, a welcoming of different perspectives as well as a shift in Supreme Court rulings on commercial speech. The court’s definition of the First Amendment broadened with the first reference to “commercial speech” made in 1972 (Columbia Broadcasting Committee v. Democratic National Committee, 1972). Justice Brennan distinguished between “commercial speech” and “controversial speech” in this case and claimed “commercial speech” received less protection than any other kind recognized by the First Amendment, still not giving a clear definition but nonetheless recognizing its limited protection (An, 2003, p. 12).

Advertising, too, was eventually recognized as a form of protected speech in the First Amendment (Columbia Broadcasting Committee v. Democratic National Committee, 1972). And rightfully so, as the industry proved its effectiveness through World War II and continued reaching the public even after the war through the industry’s work in social campaigns surrounding schools, road safety and forest conservation (An, 2003, p. 12). The advertising industry’s heightened respect as well as the consumer focus that continued well after President John F. Kennedy’s administration allowed for a new commercial speech doctrine to be accepted in 1976.
**Prelude to the New Precedent**

Before the complete overruling of *Valentine v. Chrestensen* (1942), the court ruled in *Bigelow v. Virginia* (1975) that advertising “may be subject to reasonable regulation that serves a legitimate public interest” (as cited in Casale, 2015, p. 136).

In this case, a Virginia newspaper editor was charged for violating a state law by publishing materials referring women to clinics for abortions (*Bigelow v. Virginia*, 1975). The court claimed the lower courts made a mistake by assuming advertising earned no protection from the First Amendment. The ruling still did not fold all commercial speech under the First Amendment but basically supported Justice Brennan’s comment in the 1972 *Columbia Broadcasting Committee v. Democratic National Committee* case (Casale, 2015, p. 136). Justice Blackmun delivered the majority opinion for *Bigelow v. Virginia* (1975) stating:

> “Advertising, like all public expression, may be subject to reasonable regulation that serves a legitimate public interest. See *Pittsburgh Press Co. v. Human Rel. Comm’n*, supra; *Lehman v. City of Shaker Heights*, 418 U. S. 298 (1974). To the extent that commercial activity is subject to regulation, the relationship of speech to that activity may be one factor, among others, to be considered in weighing the First Amendment interest against the governmental interest alleged. Advertising is not thereby stripped of all First Amendment protection. The relationship of speech to the marketplace of products or of services does not make it valueless in the marketplace of ideas.” (p. 421)

**The Hallmark Case**

Commercial speech was formally recognized when the Virginia Citizens Consumer Council raised concern against a Virginia statute claiming pharmacists could not advertise their prescription drug prices. The case was first appealed by a three-judge District Court and was then sent to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled the Virginia Board of Pharmacy could decide if drug prices could be advertised or not. In a
7-1 ruling, the court overturned the *Valentine v. Chrestensen* (1942) ruling and broadened the First Amendment’s guaranteed rights to include commercial speech along with all other forms of speech and expression (*Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc.*, 1976). The court in *Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc.* (1976) stated:

“Focusing first on the individual parties to the transaction that is proposed in the commercial advertisement, we may assume that the advertiser's interest is a purely economic one. That hardly disqualifies him from protection under the First Amendment. The interests of the contestants in a labor dispute are primarily economic, but it has long been settled that both the employee and the employer are protected by the First Amendment when they express themselves on the merits of the dispute in order to influence its outcome.”

The court justified its expansion of the First Amendment by shifting its focus from the speaker to the consumer (An, 2003, p. 16). This means the law protects willing speakers as well as willing listeners, more evidence of the consumerism movement benefiting the advertising world.

Redish (1971) points out the court’s previous assertion that economic motives seriously limited the First Amendment was neither “theoretically or practically” realistic as it would apply to nearly all periodicals, books, and newspapers today focused on maximizing profits (as cited in An, 2003, p. 16).

Contrary to the *Valentine v. Chrestensen* (1942) case, but nonetheless essential to understanding the case, the timing of *Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc.* (1976) is most certainly relevant. Consumerism was booming in America in 1976 with John F. Kennedy’s guaranteed rights to the consumer still in place (An, 2003, p.16). The *New York Times Co. v. United States* (1964) case also reaffirmed the value of the First Amendment’s guarantee of free speech and a free press,
which helped make this decision possible (An, 2003, p. 16). And although a new precedent had been set for commercial speech in the U.S., Justice Rehnquist’s dissenting opinion signaled the controversy concerning commercial speech was not over. In his opinion he compared electing a political office to making a decision about which shampoo to purchase, proving commercial speech had not gathered enough support to be taken seriously yet either (An, 2003, p. 17).

Clarification on Commercial Rulings

Cases following the Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc. (1976) continued to reaffirm commercial speech’s place in society. In Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. v. Public Service Commission (1980), the court established four rules when analyzing any government regulation of commercial speech, also known as the Central Hudson test (Sorrell v. IMS Health Inc., 2011). The first portion of the analysis is the speech must be “protected by the First Amendment,” meaning it cannot contain unlawful activity or misleading information (Casale, 2015, p. 137). Second, “the government’s interest must be substantial” (Casale, 2015, p. 137). Third, the regulation must advance those government interests (Casale, 2015, p. 137). And finally, the regulation must be adequate to serve those same government interests (Casale, 2015, p. 137). The four-part analysis created in the Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. v. Public Service Commission (1980) has caused commercial speech to be, as Thomson (2013) states, “virtually indistinguishable from noncommercial speech in the level of protection it enjoys” (as cited in Casale, 2015, p. 137).

Years later in 44 Liquormart, Inc. v. Rhode Island (1996), four separate opinions were written to reach a unanimous ruling (Redish, 1997, p. 561). The Supreme Court
ruled it was unconstitutional to prohibit the advertising of liquor prices in places where it was not being sold. Justice Stevens who delivered the judgement of the court said, “Advertising has been a part of our culture throughout our history. Even in colonial days, the public relied on ‘commercial speech’ for vital information about the market” (44 Liquormart, Inc. v. Rhode Island (1996).

Redish (1997) argues, however, there is a certain flaw in Justice Stevens’ position on commercial speech (p. 561). Although, Justice Stevens embraces full protection of commercial speech, he also seems willing to consider commercial speech on much less stringent terms of review than other forms of speech (Redish, 1997, p. 562). Justice Stevens fails to realize that no matter the harm caused by the content, commercial speech should get full protection if full protection and content neutrality is going to be granted by the courts (Redish, 1997, p. 562).

Justice O’Connor concurred but gave a different opinion stating she agreed that the ban on alcohol prices could not be saved by the 21st Amendment but thought the Central Hudson four-part analysis should be applied to this case. She said when the analysis is applied “Rhode Island's regulation fails the final fourth prong because its ban is more extensive than necessary to serve its stated interest” (44 Liquormart, Inc. v. Rhode Island, 1996). Justice O’Connor’s concurring opinion proves this case led to more protection of commercial speech — by not one — but all of the Supreme Court justices (Redish, 1997, p. 564).

Although, all arrived at the conclusion in different ways, the unanimous decision confirmed the rightful position of commercial speech in the marketplace of ideas. With the ability to express ideas and compete freely, advertisers were able to look to news
outlets as platforms, contributing to the selling of native advertising as well as the news-side’s increased dependency on the new advertising efforts.

In the more recent *Sorrell v. IMS Health Inc.* (2011) case, a Vermont law stated it was illegal to sell “prescriber-identifiable data ("PI data") with the intention to market or promote a prescription without the consent of the prescriber. The law was challenged by three companies — IMS Health, Verispan and Source Healthcare Analytics — who sell prescriber data to pharmaceutical companies. The court ruled that this case required “heightened judicial scrutiny,” meaning the case required special judicial review because the government regulation was placed on its content, which goes against the content neutral fundamental principle of the First Amendment.

The dissenting opinion of this case delivered by Justice Breyer references *Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. v. Public Service Communication* (1980) and *Bigelow v. Virginia* (1975) claiming commercial speech has an “informational function” and is not “valueless in the marketplace of ideas” (*Sorrell v. IMS Health Inc.*, 2011). However, Justice Breyer also points out that a less than “strict,” more “intermediate” First Amendment test has always been applied to similar cases in the past (*Sorrell v. IMS Health Inc.*, 2011). In regard to *Sorrell v. IMS Health Inc.* (2011), Breyer goes on to state:

> “Under that test, government laws and regulations may significantly restrict speech, as long as they also “directly advance” a “substantial” government interest that could not “be served as well by a more limited restriction.” Moreover, the Court has found that “sales practices” that are “misleading, deceptive, or aggressive” lack the protection of even this “intermediate” standard. 44 Liquormart, Inc. v. Rhode Island, 517 U. S. 484, 501 (1996) (opinion of Stevens, J.) And the Court has emphasized the need, in applying an “intermediate” test, to maintain the “commonsense” distinction between speech proposing a commercial transaction, which occurs in an area traditionally subject to government regulation, and other varieties of speech.”
The “commonsense doctrine,” Breyer refers to was established in *Ohralik v. Ohio State Bar Association* (1978) affording commercial speech a limited measure of protection and differences in treatment from that point forward (as cited in Farber, 1979, p. 373).

Despite monumental cases like *Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc.* (1976), the dissenting opinions and “commonsense doctrine” prove commercial speech does not enjoy absolute freedom as other forms of speech enjoy, but the scrutiny of justices throughout the years allow advertisers and publishers to enjoy much more freedom than before.
CHAPTER 3: ISSUES IN MEDIA

Without the dissenting opinions that endorsed commercial speech leading up to the *Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc.* (1976) case, the intermingling of advertising and news would not have been possible. With more freedom, news-side revenue has become more reliant on advertising as more publications are forced to operate digitally and find new ways to generate profits. Creative solutions like native advertising have allowed a lot of the larger enterprises to keep their doors open (Casale, 2015, p. 129). However, as advertising advanced, the need for regulations also increased (Casale, 2015, 145). The Federal Trade Commission (“FTC”) was established by Congress with the passing of the FTC Act of 1914 to help protect consumers and identify “unfair or deceptive acts or practices” within commerce (Casale, 2015, p. 138).

Although the FTC does not identify deceptive advertising, through the years three basic principles have been created when making the distinction, which include:

- An advertisement must be truthful without misleading the consumer (Casale, 2015, p. 139).
- The FTC insists “advertisers and ad agencies have a reasonable basis for advertising claims before they are disseminated” (Casale, 2015, p.139).
- The advertisement must not be unfair (International Harvesting Co., 1984). The FTC stated in *International Harvesting Co.* (1984) for advertisements to be labeled “unfair” there must be a consumer injury; if resting on public
policy, the policy must be “well-established” and the advertisement must be “immoral, unethical, oppressive, or unscrupulous” (as cited in Casale, 2015, p. 140).

Although the FTC has created clear guidelines, the courts ultimately have final judicial review of commercial speech cases (Casale, 2015, p.140). However, the Supreme Court has also declared “the Commission’s judgement is to be given great weight by reviewing courts” (Federal Trade Commission v. Colgate-Palmolive Co., 1965).

As more journalists, marketing and public relations professionals voice their concern with the deceptive nature of native advertising, the FTC is forced to pay more attention to the growing industry (Schauster et. al, 2016, p. 1413; Casale, 2015, p. 145). The first step toward addressing native advertising was the FTC’s workshop held in December 2013 titled, “Blurred Lines: Advertising or Content? — An FTC Workshop on Native Advertising” (Casale, 2015, p. 147). Advertisers, communicators and consumers were invited to the workshop, which ultimately revealed transparency was of utmost importance to the federal agency (Casale, 2015, p. 148). However, the workshop also left it unclear as to what action was going to be taken (Casale, 2015, p. 148).

Cope (2013) claims the industry is hesitant to use the term “advertisement” to describe native advertising because it may discourage consumers from engaging with the content” (as cited in Casale, 2015, p. 148). The FTC also showed resistance to using any other commonly used phrases such as “sponsored content,” “sponsored by,” or “presented by” because the phrases didn’t portray the advertiser accurately (Casale, 2015, p. 148). Cope (2013) asserted the alternate labels for native advertising make it seem as if
the advertiser has just guaranteed payment of the publication’s independent content instead of suggesting they took part in the creation of it (Casale, 2015, p. 148).

For native advertising to even fall within the regulations and guidelines put in place by the FTC, the advertisement must fall within the definition of “commercial speech” set by the courts (Casale, 2015, p. 149). Supreme Court’s current definition has been broadly stated as “speech advocating the sale of commercial products or services,” (Lorillard Tobacco Co. v. Reilly, 2001). To fulfill this definition, the native advertisement must meet three requirements established in Bolger v. Youngs Drugs Prods. Corp. (1983). As cited in Casale (2015), to be considered commercial speech, material must be:

- A true advertisement
- Refer to a specific product
- Have an economic motive

This means in order for a story structured in the form of a list to be considered commercial speech as in BuzzFeed’s “14 Cringeworthy High School Moments Everyone Has Experienced,” it must directly promote the sale of a specific product.

List number-formatted stories also identified as “listicles” by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (“IAB”) are not the only way advertisers can position content on a publisher’s page (Ponikvar, 2015, p. 1189). The various formats a story can take online have caused additional problems for the FTC, one being how to properly to disclose native advertisements (Casale, 2015, p. 150).

As the IAB has stated, there really is not a one-size-fits-all way of distinguishing between what is paid for and what is not (Casale, 2015, p.150). Larger publications like
the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have implemented style guidelines and specific branding to let readers know when they are viewing commercial content.

![The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com)

**Figure 3.1** T Brand Studio sponsored content website article. From “Multilingualism is on the rise and schools are racing to catch up” by T Brand Studio. Retrieved from [https://www.nytimes.com/paidpost/qatar-foundation/multilingualism-is-on-the-rise-and-schools-are-racing-to-catch-up.html](https://www.nytimes.com/paidpost/qatar-foundation/multilingualism-is-on-the-rise-and-schools-are-racing-to-catch-up.html).

![The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com)

**Figure 3.2** T Brand Studio sponsored content website article. From “Multilingualism is on the rise and schools are racing to catch up” by T Brand Studio. Retrieved from [https://www.nytimes.com/paidpost/qatar-foundation/multilingualism-is-on-the-rise-and-schools-are-racing-to-catch-up.html](https://www.nytimes.com/paidpost/qatar-foundation/multilingualism-is-on-the-rise-and-schools-are-racing-to-catch-up.html).
However, a professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law determined that 50% of consumers don’t know what “sponsor” means when positioned on an ad and that many consumers don’t care if the content is paid for or not (Ponikvar, 2015, p. 1198). However, critics of native advertising would argue a label is better than no label at all.
Issues with First Amendment today

Although not everyone accepts native advertising in practice, the success of the storytelling strategy cannot be ignored.

As a case study, Clark & Meyler (2015) found that General Electric’s (“GE”) native advertising campaign in 2015 was viewed by more than 5 million people and generated approximately 416,000 click-throughs. GE’s click-through rate was 8%, exceeding the 0.2% click-through rate of 2012, proving the consumer wanted to read actual content rather than traditional advertising (as cited in Ponikvar, 2015, p. 1191).

Consumer research by Montini (2014) also showed that 70% of users would rather see stories they can relate to versus traditional banner ads increasing the overall purchasing intent of the consumer (as cited in Ponikvar, 2015, p. 1194).

Yet, critics point to the ethical problems surrounding the lack of transparency with native advertising and the potential loss of trust in media (Schauster et. al, 2016, p. 1413). Critics argue you can’t justify the deception of native advertising just because the perceived credibility of an ad is boosted by the placement on a news site (Ponikvar, 2015, p. 1194). In Ortho Pharmaceutical Corp. v. Cosprophar, Inc. (1994) the court ruled the advertorial format was designed “to enhance the seriousness and credibility of [Cosprophar's] advertising,” acknowledging critics’ claims that the intent of native advertising is to blend in with editorial content.

Publications today have begun combatting ethical concerns by creating in-house agencies and brand studios staffed with separate teams, sharing only the publication’s audience and subscribers as seen in the New York Times’ T Brand Studio and The Atlantic’s Re:think studio (Levi, 2015, p. 658). The New York Times’ first major move in
native advertising was its partnership with Dell, using advertisers and freelance journalists to tell the computer technology company’s story (Levi, 2015, p. 658).

A more controversial partnership was *The Atlantic*’s paid post partnership with the Church of Scientology that again brought the issue of intent to the forefront (Casale, 2015, p. 146). Critics immediately attacked *The Atlantic* for its promotional treatment on the site. Warzel (2013) claimed critics were calling it “blatant propaganda” due to the promotional language of the religion (as cited in Casale, 2015, p. 146). For example, the article included this sentence: “2012 was a milestone year for Scientology, with the religion expanding to more than 10,000 Churches, Missions and affiliated groups, spanning 167 nations—figures that represent a growth rate 20 times that of a decade ago” (as cited in Casale, 2015, p. 146). Warzel (2013) argues *The Atlantic* garnered so much negative attention because the Church of Scientology article contrasted the publication’s typical tone and language too drastically (as cited in Casale, 2015, p. 146).

While native advertising should match the language and quality standards of the publisher’s brand, Casale (2015) argues there should still be a reasonable distinction between editorial content and sponsored material to protect itself from FTC action and to better serve the consumer overall (p. 152).

Michael Giusti, director of student publications at Loyola University, has had a long-developed stance on sponsored content after prior experience in both branding and publishing (M. Giusti, personal communication, November 25, 2019). Giusti said he believes sponsored content is a great way to fund media; his issue with sponsored content is when news outlets place their logo on the content and try to sell it as their own (M. Giusti, personal communication, November 25, 2019). Because as Giusti states “what
you’re selling when you post it as your own content, even marked and labeled as sponsored content, what you’re selling is your credibility” (M. Giusti, personal communication, November 25, 2019).

Giusti recommends student media organizations do explore new ways to push the journalism business model forward, like selling access to the publication’s audience (M. Giusti, personal communication, November 25, 2019). However, Giusti argues audiences are not sophisticated enough to understand what a sponsored content label means(M. Giusti, personal communication, November 25, 2019). He said these storytelling formats are better off being designed as traditional advertisements instead of blending it with a publication’s certain look and feel (M. Giusti, personal communication, November 25, 2019).

The untapped digital space though is where the wall separating advertising and editorial is most threatened. As technology advances and consumer engagement becomes more of the focus on a digital platform, the industry has to evolve. As Starkman (2013) suggests, in some cases the editorial team may even be more inclined to select which advertisers to collaborate with based on the overall brand and trust of its readers (as cited in Casale 2016, p. 147). Editors instead of advertisers may be better suited to make decisions because they don’t have financial influence, justifying the intermingling of both entities once again (Casale, 2015, p. 147). So long as publishers are pursuing native advertising, the editorial and the branded content teams are going to have to communicate in some way to get content online, in print or just to be aware of what is being covered. The inclusion of advertising to the freedom of speech clause in the U.S. Constitution was just the first step in enabling the wall to come down.
CHAPTER 4: TRENDS IN SPONSORED CONTENT

Native advertising has certainly matured since its emergence in 2013 (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019, p. 4). As sponsored content comes in all shapes and sizes, single scroll digital experiences, “listicles,” and social media prove to be effective for major publishers today. Native advertising can be seen on three primary channels:

- Content feeds such as a website or news channel
- Social feeds such as social networking sites or messaging applications
- Product feeds such as Amazon, Etsy and eBay

Native advertising can range from written articles to images and long-form documentaries. The Interactive Advertising Bureau or “IAB” (2019) published a “Native Advertising Playbook” comparing the 2013 key factors impacting change with 2019. This included the fact that almost every major publisher now has its own branded content studio compared with the few dozen in 2013 (p. 4).

Programmatic ad buying and native advertising are now included in OpenRTB (Real-time Bidding) specifications, aiding to the success of the industry as well as the growth of social media. OpenRTB just means that advertisers can place a bid for an ad and if their bid is the highest, the ad will be instantly placed on the publisher’s site.

The shift from a consumer-first mindset on mobile also helped bring native advertising to the forefront (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019, p. 4). Consumer-first means brands want to connect with consumers recognizing that ad-blocking was becoming a real issue. Clear disclosure and labeling remain important considerations.
when dealing with native advertising (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019, p. 4). When determining if these two requirements have been met, the FTC considers the “net impression” of the advertisement on the consumer and any “qualifying information” in the ad (Interactive Advertising Bureau 2019, p. 21). Qualifying information means the publisher’s connection to the content must be clear and understood. For mediums such as audio and video, the FTC states the disclaimer must remain on screen long enough to be read and understood and may even need to be repeated, if necessary (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019, p. 21).

![US Native Digital Display Ad Spending, 2016-2020](image)


The IAB has made changes to the core types of media considered to be native advertising. Promoted listings, standard advertisements with native elements like real-time weather, custom items such as playlists and paid searches are no longer considered native advertising by the IAB.
Branded/native content, in-feed/in-content and content recommendation ads are considered the three core types of native advertising. In-feed/in-content ads are typically placed in content or social feeds and link off of the site to native content, editorial content or the brand’s landing page. Content recommendation ads suggest specific videos, articles and products typically listed beneath the original article. Finally, branded/native content “is paid content from a brand that is published in the same format as full editorial on a publisher’s site,” which is where this research focuses primarily (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019, p. 7).

Design, location, ad behavior and disclosure are the four criteria to determine between native and standard ads. The FTC’s native advertising disclosure guidance issued in December 2015 established clear labeling as a core criterion. (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019, p. 8).

To help newer publications properly label native advertising and sponsored content, the FTC lists multiple examples of acceptable forms of disclosure and deceptive advertising. Among those examples, one acceptable example they provide is:

“The Winged Mercury Company sells running shoes. An ad for the company’s flagship shoe appears on a financial news site. The ad contains an image of the shoe, the headline “Run Fast, Run Smart, Run Winged Mercury,” and a hyperlink to learn more about Winged Mercury shoes’ innovative shock absorption. The color scheme, font, and graphics of the ad look like the format of the financial news that appears on the site. However, the slogan “Run Fast, Run Smart, Run Winged Mercury” together with the message to learn more about Winged Mercury shoes’ shock absorption likely convey to consumers the commercial nature of the content” (“Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses,” 2015).

The FTC states the content of the running shoes ad differs significantly from the traditional content on a financial site, which makes this a properly labeled native ad.
Using that same Winged Mercury Company example, the FTC also provides an example of an unacceptable native advertising appearance. However, this time the ad is posted to Fitness Life, an online health and wellness magazine.

“The ad is similar in format and content to regular articles on the site. The headline “Running Gear Up: Mistakes to Avoid” appears next to a photo of a runner. In addition to other training suggestions, the article recommends Winged Mercury shoes for injury prevention. Consumers can access the article either from the Fitness Life main page or directly without viewing that page. In this instance, consumers are likely to conclude that the article was written by a Fitness Life journalist and reflects the journalist’s independent views. To prevent consumer deception, a clear and prominent disclosure of the ad’s commercial nature on the main page of the publisher’s site is necessary. In addition, because consumers can access the article without clicking through from the Fitness Life main page, the ad on that click-into page also should be clearly and prominently identified as commercial” (“Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses,” 2015).

To ensure a native advertisement is recognizable by consumers, the FTC encourages advertisers should consider the ad as a whole and consider more than just the statements, visuals and language (“Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses,” 2015). When determining whether an ad has been clearly labeled, the FTC urges advertisers to consider three things (“Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses,” 2015):

1. The overall appearance of the advertisement

2. The similarities in visual, written and or spoken style of the publisher site it’s housed on

3. The ability to distinguish it from other pieces on the publisher’s site
In-Feed Native Ads

In-Feed Native Ads are placed in article and content feeds and mimic the surrounding site design and aesthetics. As consumers scroll the listing of article summaries, editorial is mixed with native ad units providing an uninterrupted flow.

Figure 4.2 In-feed native advertisements. From *IAB Native Advertising Playbook 2.0* by Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019.

In-Content Native Ads

In-Content Native Ads are ads placed primarily on article pages, in between paragraphs of content or below the article, and are designed in such a way that they mimic the design and aesthetics of the surrounding editorial content experience.

Figure 4.3 In-feed native advertisements. From *IAB Native Advertising Playbook 2.0* by Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019.
With technology advancing, marketers and publishers can only expect the industry to continue to grow. Publishers are now experimenting with artificial intelligence and virtual reality (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019, p. 22). Technology has allowed for native advertising to get closer to consumers whether that be through a single scroll article with impactful infographics or speaking with a chatbot programmed within the ad.

Technology has changed native advertising from what was once a destination on a webpage to now a journey through a single scroll because getting eyes on the page isn’t enough anymore, the former New York Times international creative director Graham
McDonnell said in an article (Salz, 2018). T Brand Studio has combatted this trend by placing a branded footer at the bottom of their paid posts to make sure there is a common thread of disclosure throughout the article (Salz, 2018).

While most conversations concern the format of the ad itself, consumers and media professionals must recognize the main goal of native is to connect with the consumer more organically. The goal moving forward must be to get the public to understand the question “What is native?” to eliminate the biggest concern: deception.

The next section will look more in depth at various branded content studios across the country from professional news outlets to student media developing their own form of sponsored content.
PART II: A LOOK INTO SPONSORED CONTENT TODAY
The New York Times’ T Brand Studio was founded in 2014 after drops in display advertising proved the need for another form of revenue.

T Brand Studio is the in-house branded content and creative services agency for the New York Times. Sebastian Tomich, who came to the New York Times from Forbes, and Meredith Levien founded the studio with former T Brand Studio executive editorial director, Adam Aston. Dean Baquet had been named managing editor shortly after the studio was founded and although there was some resistance to the development of a branded content studio, the new leadership team was confident they could do it responsibly without confusing readers, T Brand Studio creative director Nathan Reese said.

What started as a handful of producers and developers for T Brand Studio has now turned into a studio of close to 200 people. Since its founding, T Brand Studio has expanded well beyond written articles and experimented with long-form video, 360-degree filming, and augmented reality. T Brand Studio offers services online, in-print in the New York Times and white label work that is not labeled New York Times for advertisers. The content studio has also since acquired Hello Society, an influencer marketing agency, and Fake Love, an experiential agency.

“It’s adjacent to an advertiser’s space, but we do everything from AR/VR experiential, social campaigns, you name it — we can do,” Reese said. “If an advertising studio can do it, we can do it.”
Reese said what separates T Brand Studio from the thousands of other content studios in existence today is the one thing nobody else has — New York Times subscribers and its audience, which is approximately 4.7 million digital and print subscribers combined, New York Times correspondent Marc Tracy said in an article on the Times’ website.

The New York Times, a publication with a reputation of holding journalism to the highest standard with long-form articles and documentary-style videos, places immense pressure on T Brand Studio to follow suit in order to be considered “native.”

Reese has been with T Brand Studio since 2015, serving previously as a writing editor at the branded content studio. Before joining the T Brand Studio staff, Reese had contributed to the New York Times and worked for T Magazine — coming from a more traditional journalism background.

Reese said the benefit of staffing by former journalists is the team attacks the stories just as the editorial team would at the New York Times regardless of the advertiser’s own aims.

“What we try to do at the Times is to create as interesting and rigorously reported work in the branded content space as the newsroom is doing but on behalf of our brand partners,” Reese said. “So, it’s brand journalism and storytelling but done on behalf of the partners with their messaging in mind.”

**Organizational structure**

T Brand Studio is made up of nearly 200 content creators, which includes creative directors, editors, photographers, videographers, writers, art directors, designers, developers, illustrators, animators, program managers, copyeditors, etc.
A creative director at T Brand Studio works with all of the creative team to brainstorm interesting project ideas for clients and helps them execute those ideas. Reese said creative directors come from all types of backgrounds — his being writing. He said more commonly creative directors come from the commercial work or visual side of things. A total of eight creative directors work within the T Brand Studio, all with 10-plus years of experience, Reese said.

“It’s similar to what I was doing as an editor, but now I can work with things like experiential, work with the people at Fake Love, work with video and it’s just a little bit broader in terms of my purview,” Reese said.

The sales team is not included in the team of 200. The sales team is on the business side of operations selling creative work for T Brand Studio as well as advertising for the newsroom.

T Brand Studio operates similarly to an agency. A program manager on each project handles all client communication after something sells. In the presale phase, the sales team talks to the client. The creative team is also talking to the client but is not involved in logistics. This enables the creative team to talk through their work while the client is reviewing. Reese said he also attends pitch meetings frequently to sell clients on certain ideas the team has conceived.

**Creative process**

Being the New York Times’ creative services agency, T Brand Studio gets many of their projects from the clients requesting to work with them directly. However, there are times when creatives on staff will pitch an idea to a client. Most projects though begin with
a Request-for-Proposal (RFP) from a client, which then leads to a brainstorming session with the T Brand Studio team.

The brainstorming session will include a mixture of people in order to get various perspectives — a creative director, an editor, someone from the video team, a designer and a sales team member. Reese said sales is almost always involved in the pitches, just not always involved in the creative process. It really depends on the sales consultant and how invested they’d like to be in the project.

From there, the team discusses different directions the project could go and bounces ideas off of each other. The best ideas are drafted and sent to the client to evaluate. Those ideas can be discussed in-person, over the phone and sometimes via email. If things go well, the client will approve an idea. If they are not satisfied with the selection of ideas, the creative team goes back and forth with the client until both parties are satisfied with the project conception.

Typically, a lot of overlap occurs between the brainstorming team in the presale phase and who actually works on the project in the execution phase. The back and forth communication doesn’t stop after the sale either. Mood boards, drafts and mock-ups are sent to the client for review and revisions. Reese said sometimes that process can be smooth and sometimes it can be a much lengthier process.

A typical project timeline will run between eight to 12 weeks. Reese said there have been projects that have taken more than a year to complete, but eight to 12 weeks is when you get a “happy team.”
T Brand Studio works with global companies, produces award-winning work and therefore has the advantage of operating on a large budget. Reese said creative projects range from thousands to millions of dollars for custom creative pieces of work.

“It’s all contingent on what’s being put into the page,” Reese said.

Services like 3-D renderings that take months to create cost more than text and images on a webpage. However, Reese said his mind doesn’t really fathom budget as a numbers game. His mind instead immediately goes to how much can we do with this much money, giving clients as much as they choose to invest.

The success of a native advertising piece is then based upon benchmarks created by the T Brand Studio internal data team. Time spent on pages, interactions and engagements are clear measures for clients to see. When T Brand Studio sells a project to a client, they deliver. This means when an advertiser pays for content they know exactly how many eyes are going to get on the page, the video or piece. The views are not organic.

Reese said much of their attention is organic, but they run ads until the client gets what it paid for. Certain measurements such as how long people are spending on a page or how they’re interacting with a page can be helpful clues as to what makes for a good experience. Other intangibles also important to T Brand Studio are things like earned media, press coverage or awards for their work and every client is different as to what success means to them.

The New York Times will also feature advertisements for the sponsored content on their homepage. This helps get exposure to New York Times subscribers who might not otherwise see the T Brand Studio work and helps ensure the number of eyes that the client pays for reaches the project.

Graham McDonnell, the former international creative director for T Brand Studio, said in a 2018 Mobile Growth Summit article the best kind of branded content taps into human nature.

“It’s important to tell a human story, one that’s relatable for the audience, and not get ahead of yourself by trying to figure out if VR, for example, might be the best way to tell the story,” McDonnell said in the article.

He said in the article the best branded content comes from marrying the advertiser’s goal with the in-house agency’s expertise. McDonnell said brands come to T Brand Studio with a message and the studio’s goal is to position that message within a story that will resonate with their respective audience. Reese said they have streamlined a lot of what they do because they have found that scrolling is the best way to move through an experience nowadays. He said if you look at a paid post from 2016, it’s likely that you can interact with a lot of things on the page because that’s what was popular at the time.

**Ethical dilemmas**

Unlike the New York Times, T Brand Studio typically does not place bylines on their paid posts. There are special circumstances in which a byline might be placed on a story. For example, if a story is written in first person and the story will be strengthened by revealing the writer’s identity, a byline will be granted.

Reese said the main reason is to service the brands the studio represents correctly; they have chosen to remove any sort of conflict of interest that they can. As an international content studio, it is possible for an editor or writer to work for competing brands. Reese said T Brand Studio doesn’t want to seem as if they are favoring one brand over another.
Another reason they have opted from placing names on paid posts is due to the frequent movement from traditional journalism to brand journalism. T Brand Studio doesn’t want to limit a team member’s career opportunities if another publisher or freelance employer might be uncomfortable with brand association.

“It’s just what we’ve decided and what our contributors, and freelancers and internal editors thought was the best way to go,” Reese said.

Another ethical concern among critics is the separation between editorial and advertising that must be upheld to report accurately. The New York Times has decided in an effort to responsibly execute branded content, they have created a clear separation between advertorial and editorial. The newsroom has no part in the publication of any T Brand Studio content and vice versa. If a writer moves to the T Brand Studio staff, they are no longer allowed to write for the newsroom, meaning there is no crossover between the staffs.

Following the standard set by their host publication, T Brand Studio holds itself to most of the same ethical and journalistic standards as does the New York Times. T Brand Studio’s ethical standards differ slightly in that the client is involved throughout the entire creative process and the content studio will go in the direction the clients wants. Reese said although it’s advertising and it’s important for people to know that it is an ad, it’s also important for an advertisement to be factually accurate.

“You still have social responsibility on behalf of your clients and on behalf of the New York Times brand to be as straightforward as possible,” Reese said.

The T Brand Studio airs on the more conservative side when it comes to branded content studios, Reese said. They make it a priority to stay true to brand storytelling and
brand journalism. Reese said they never attribute words someone who didn’t say them or place false information in a paid post.

T Brand Studio also makes an effort to be aware of what the editorial side of the New York Times is doing as to stay up to date with the content. However, editorial content being covered has no influence on what T Brand Studio covers, Reese said.

T Brand Studio attempts to make the distinction between native and traditional advertising more prominent in their display of content and disclosure. Each paid post is labeled “paid for and posted by” with the advertiser’s name clearly stated. The disclaimer is displayed with a blue bar at the top of the page that follows consumers as they scroll on the page.

“We have absolutely zero interest into fooling anyone that this is content created by our newsroom, down to, like, the font choices that we have and the designs that we use,” Reese said.

He said T Brand Studio’s aim is to make the most compelling content possible whether it’s an advertisement or not, but the goal is not to deceive the reader. Reese also mentioned that consumers must click through an ad unit to reach T Brand Studio content, making the way you get to content different than the newsroom too.

T Brand Studio does use a similar font to the rest of the editorial content to write the word “paid post” on the homepage of the New York Times.

“If it was up to advertisers, nothing would be labeled an advertisement,” Reese said. “So, we still need to be able to market this stuff, but we came to the conclusion that this was kind of an appropriate way of labeling our work.”

First paid post

T Brand Studio launched in 2014 with Dell as their first paid partnership, delivering a three-month engagement to consumers. The first article written was titled, “Reaching Across the Office from Marketing to IT.”

Dell’s managing editor, Stephanie Losee wrote in a press release to Dell customers, “On our Paid Posts page you’ll find stories about entrepreneurs, innovation
and other subjects our audiences have expressed interest in rather than Dell talking about Dell or our products.”

Losee stressed the purpose of the strategy was to better serve Dell customers.

The New York Times advertised the paid posts on the homepage with the Dell logo at the top of the mass head and a blue box advertising the post on the main page you could click through to get to the actual article. AdAge reports Dell paid a six-figure price tag for this three-month initiative. In response to the success of the first paid post in Jan. 2014, VP of advertising at the New York Times, Seb Tomich said in an interview with NewsCred Insights, “what we’re chasing isn’t necessarily metrics, it’s reader interest.”
Orange is the New Black sparks the start

Reese claims the Orange is the New Black partnership with Netflix is what really sparked the success of the T Brand Studio. Reese said this was the article where advertisers realized you really can do some aggressive journalistic reporting in brand space.

Melanie Deziel’s piece, “Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn’t Work,” features moving illustrations, a compelling narrative detailing the unique and untold
difficulties women face in prison, short-film documentaries spread throughout the article and audio clips from ex-prisoners reflecting their experiences.

The advertiser in this piece is buried within a much deeper narrative — a narrative that matters to women off all kinds. McDonnell stated in the Mobile Growth Summit article, the simplest formula for a successful branded content piece is following the narrative arc. He said in the article introducing an element or character is first, in this case, female inmates. Next, he said you present a problem or hurdle. The problem in Deziel’s piece is the degrading environment women are placed in when admitted to prison. McDonnell said in the article the final step is to reveal an award or outcome. In the Orange is the New Black sponsored post, Hawaii is the award. Hawaii’s penitentiary system is the model others should follow to help heal women and reform prison policies.

![Image](https://www.nytimes.com/paidpost/netflix/women-inmates-separate-but-not-equal.html)


Native advertising turns to human chatbots

T Brand Studio won the Native Advertising Institute’s 2017 award for “Most creative Native Advertising Campaign” for its project titled, “What it Takes to be Human” paid for by UBS, a company that provides financial advice to wealthy corporations and private clients in Switzerland. The project combines a five-chapter article and short film documentary about a leading humanoid designer in Osaka, Japan. The project also included Rose, a virtual chatbot, who spoke to the audience from the screen about whatever they wanted, but subtly encouraged the consumer to continue reading the content.

The campaign was intended to grow awareness of an exclusive UBS group dedicated to solving societal issues and to engage with High Net Worth Individuals. T Brand Studio focused the campaign on the development of artificial intelligence (“AI”) throughout the years with mentions of notable figures in the industry. According to the Native Advertising Institute, the campaign surpassed the target reach of 100,000 site visits and received more than 200,000 visits in a three-month period. Additionally, the UBS.com site received 2,647 visits, which demonstrated a true link between the native ad
and increased brand awareness with the consumer, the Native Advertising Institute said in its article titled, “How a Global Financial Services Firm Grew Awareness Using AI & Native Advertising.” The chatbot and video garnered an average scroll rate of 68.4%, illustrating how far people got in the page, proving the chatbot and video element encouraged more engagement, the article said.

Figure 5.9 UBS sponsored content piece featuring Rose, an interactive chatbot. From “What it Takes to be Human” by T Brand Studio, 2017.

Figure 5.10 Award-winning native advertising campaign titled, “AI: What it Takes to be Human” by T Brand Studio, 2017.
CHAPTER 6: THE ATLANTIC’S RE:THINK STUDIO

(Interviewed Atlantic 57 senior editor Margaret Myers on Nov. 15, 2019 and Atlantic 57 executive director of strategic partnerships Deirdre Torrance on Jan. 10, 2020).

The Atlantic has a few different business divisions to its publication — the magazine and website, Atlantic 57 (A57), a creative agency that works with various clients, Re:think, an in-house branded content studio creating content for the publication, and AtlanticLIVE, the events branch of the media company.

Margaret Myers, a senior editor for A57, said what they tell their clients is The Atlantic has learned a lot producing the work that they do, and A57 hopes to use years of experience and knowledge to help clients come up with creative solutions that work.

Organizational structure

A57 and Re:think were both founded in 2013. The difference between the two is in the audiences each target, Myers said. Re:think is shaping their content for an Atlantic audience, whereas A57 is developing their content and messaging for the client’s specific audience or possibly creating the audience themselves.

A57 runs more like an agency, said Deirdre Torrance, executive director of strategic partnerships at The Atlantic. There are about 60 people on staff at A57 including the “growth team,” which is the traditional sales team, Myers said. The Atlantic sales team, specifically, consists of:

- Three people who represent every division of The Atlantic selling all services
- Five people who serve as functional salespeople selling more than A57 services
• 13 people who serve a more direct sales role on what’s called the “media team” selling content for The Atlantic magazine, website and Re:think studio

• Eight people who sell only AtlanticLIVE services

Every sales representative is assigned a predetermined client list, which varies in length depending on the opportunity on that list.

Figure 6.1 The Renewal Project homepage sponsored by Allstate Insurance and produced by Atlantic 57. From The Renewal Project by Atlantic 57. Retrieved from https://www.therenewalproject.com/.

Figure 6.2 The Nautilus project sponsored by Lincoln and produced by The Atlantic’s Re:think branded content studio. From The Nautilus by Re:think. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/sponsored/nautilus/lincoln-nautilus/3076/.
Re:think creative process

The sales representatives at The Atlantic take a very proactive position, Torrance said. They are reaching out to clients to check in periodically and pitching their services at the same time. Torrance said it may be that a client doesn’t have the budget or interest at the time the media team calls them, but the call may plant a seed that causes them to reach back out for business.

In the presale phase for the Re:think studio a sales representative will put together an opportunity brief, which will answer questions the creative team may have about a particular project. This includes:

- What kind of audience the client is trying to reach
- Client goals
- What the client’s marketing messages are
- Previous work the client has done
- Any specific themes the client would like to focus on
- And/or if the client has any inspiration they’ve found on their own

The sales representative then has 48 hours to submit an opportunity brief from the point of contact with the client.

After the sales representative fills out the opportunity brief, they will call an internal briefing with Re:think’s creative team, account management team, revenue operations team and creative solutions team, who are responsible for maintaining all of the client relationships throughout the process once the sale has been made. Anyone else who could be helpful on the project may also be invited to the internal briefing.
After the internal briefing, the creative team meets alone to brainstorm the concept. The strategists will then meet with the sales representative to present one or two ideas. The sales representative will offer perspective and ensure that certain questions have been answered, such as:

- Does this fit all of the client’s needs?
- Does this present any risk or harm?

In some cases, the team may be going off of an RFP, similar to the T Brand Studio. The final concept is then submitted to the client always over email. Torrance said it is also preferred to meet in-person to discuss the email, but it ultimately depends on the relationship with the client.

The concept is then shaped and molded depending on the client’s critiques and concerns. Throughout this process, the sales team is the main point of contact. Then, the account manager takes over, also called the creative solutions manager, once the sale has been made. This is more of a creative position in nature, Torrance said. The entire presale process typically takes about a week to go back and forth with edits.

Prices for their services are listed on a rate card they present to clients. Depending on the type of content and how long the content takes to produce are two of the main determinants of price. Written articles are the most cost effective and video and audio are more expensive.

Torrance said sales is involved in the entire process to make sure clients are happy. The sales team is also trying to find out how to optimize the partnership with the client, asking them ways The Atlantic can improve the process, what’s working well and what’s not. Torrance said there are a lot of different touch points in the process to
strengthen those relationships with clients, such as taking clients out to lunch and dinner and connecting with them on levels outside of work.

Throughout the whole process, the sales team is also monitoring performance very closely on the project. Torrance said there is paid social boosts behind the posts to make sure The Atlantic is getting enough eyeballs on the content. Similar to the T Brand Studio, clients know exactly how many people are going to see their content before buying.

“We monitor it every other day to see how the traffic and engagement is doing and then at the end we would certainly follow up with a full report,” Torrance said.

The Atlantic’s follow-up report is a useful model for media companies interested in pursuing sponsored content in the future. The report — detailed, organized, minimalistic and useful for the client and The Atlantic — explains ways the project could be improved.

The media report includes, but is not limited to:

- A brief overview
- Results
- The development of the project
- Webpage analytics such as page views, unique views, time spent on page and active dwell time
- Number of mentions in the media
- Video performance detailing views, average view duration and complete views
- Social media results and screenshots for examples
• Audience details explaining who was reading, consuming or looking at the project revealing whether or not the goal audience was reached

• Insights which detail project challenges and changes to make to similar projects moving forward

Using The Atlantic as an example and metrics other media companies have provided to clients; the model follow-up report below would best serve sponsored content agencies moving forward.
Figure 6.3 Mock client report based off of the Re:think client report provided by Deirdre Torrance, The Atlantic executive director of strategic partnerships. This is a fictitious client and branded content studio adopted for educational purposes.
Ethical dilemmas

Myers said the very baseline rule for A57 at The Atlantic is that every story is reported in the same way any journalist would cover a news story — with the same ethical guidelines and complete transparency. Myers said all A57 stories appear on a separate branded site clearly labeled as sponsored content. On The Renewal Project website, the disclaimer appears across the top of the page in a black banner with the words “Made possible by Allstate” and Allstate Insurance’s logo.

Re:think labels its work similarly with a banner across the top of a story in a separate webpage with The Atlantic Re:think label in the top left corner and “paid for by” in the center of the banner with the company logo underneath.

Figure 6.5 An article produced for The Renewal Project paid for by Allstate Insurance. From “What homeless shelters really need” by The Renewal Project, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.therenewalproject.com/what-homeless-shelters-really-need/.

Re:think does place bylines on their sponsored content stories. However, if a story is written by the A57 team on The Renewal Project website, they will place “The Renewal Project” in the byline position. Other stories posted on The Renewal Project website are gathered from news outlets, websites and/or are stories submitted to Myers and her team.

**The Atlantic’s version of sponsored content**

Success of sponsored content can be measured in a lot of different ways. For The Atlantic, Myers said it’s up to the media team to work with the client to determine what defines success. For Myers on The Renewal Project, she said she has seen much success in the email newsletter she has been sending because she values engagement. She sees more than just eyes on a page, she said. She can see how many people took the time to open the email, read the newsletter and engage with it.
The Renewal Project has a lot of written sponsored content. Myers said the most successful stories in terms of pageviews, have not been certain length or had anything special about them, but were timely and offered consumers new or useful information. Myers said the stories need a unique angle. Myers said:

“One of our most popular stories was about a guy in Nebraska who was really concerned about climate change and wanted to do something to lessen his carbon footprint so he, he lived in the suburbs, he tore up his entire lawn, planted a garden and then one-by-one, each one of his neighbors were like, “Hey, that’s a really good idea. I’m going to tear up my lawn.” And so now, his entire neighborhood is just a garden and they just created over the course of a few years, they created a community garden.”

Another one of A57’s most popular stories was one about a bar manager who made it mandatory for the bar staff to go through bystander training, so they knew what to do and how to spot a dangerous customer. Myers said people in New York City, Washington, D.C. and large cities throughout the world were reading the story wondering if their bar owners were doing the same thing. The story was successful because it ran in the #MeToo era making the issue timely, relevant and relatable to consumers.
Figure 6.6 Unique angle for The Renewal Project. From “How to create a neighborhood garden on your city block” by Tim Rinne, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.therenewalproject.com/how-to-create-a-neighborhood-garden-on-your-city-block/.

Figure 6.7 Timely and relevant article produced for The Renewal Project. From “This upstate New York bar is a model for nightlife safety” by Ashley Cake, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.therenewalproject.com/ithaca-bar-safety/.
With more than 9 billion content views a month and three out of five U.S. millennials viewing its content per month, BuzzFeed has managed to captivate a global audience with its sponsored content, BuzzFeed said on its advertising landing page. The company has also managed to keep revenue up, despite recent layoffs, reportedly earning $300 million in revenue in 2018.

BuzzFeed founder and CEO Jonah Peretti developed the company chasing virality and started the sponsored content sector in 2013. He blames 20th century media businesses for making advertising the “necessary evil” within journalism today, he said in a New York Magazine article, titled “Does BuzzFeed know the secret?” Contrary to most other publishers, Peretti said in the article that he doesn’t care whether a post is produced by a journalist or sponsored by a brand; he just wants it to spread.

BuzzFeed has two types of native advertising: branded content and cobranded, said Dwayne Henry, the supervising producer of branded content at BuzzFeed. The difference is that cobranded is not a commercial. Cobranded is BuzzFeed content with a sponsor attached to it, opposed to branded content where the client is driving what the content should be.

Henry said he doesn’t really deal with BuzzFeed’s sponsored listicles. Those are sold by the web advertising team, who also sell regular advertisements featured on the main website or welcome screen.
As the supervising producer, Henry said he makes sure every project is executed the way it needs to be done. He’s not on the ground floor producing anything but he does oversee budgets on projects.

He said his main responsibility is branded content, but he also oversees spin-off BuzzFeed brands like Nifty, Goodful and Tasty. He currently works in the Los Angeles office but supervises projects in the New York office as well. However, BuzzFeed has offices all over the world in Toronto, India, Australia and more. There are five or six supervising producers total, with one in each office, except New York because he handles things there too.

**Organizational structure**

There are multiple teams within the branded content division of BuzzFeed. Henry also stressed the cobranded team never mixes with the newsroom operations of BuzzFeed. He described the cobranded department as the creative agency or ad agency to BuzzFeed.

The sales team at BuzzFeed is huge with salespeople all over the world. Henry said the sales team can sell cobranded content from anywhere in the world but a lot of times it depends on where the brand is located. A creative team works in each of the offices with 12 people on the creative team in the Los Angeles office, which includes writers and creative directors, Henry said.

The creatives are in-house and salaried. BuzzFeed only utilizes freelance writers when they don’t have the capacity to handle a project with the in-house employees.

A team of producers and production managers handle the logistics of projects with Henry, he said. Production crews are included in the cobranded staff team, who deal
with technical things like cameras and sound. However, web programmers are not on Henry’s team. He said they operate separately and mostly in the New York office.

**BuzzFeed organizational structure diagram**

1. Dwayne ———— Creative director ———— Sales manager
2. Team of producers —— Creatives (includes editors) —— Client managers
3. Production managers
4. Production crews

**Cobranded creative process**

The cobranded ideas always start within BuzzFeed, meaning clients are not approaching the BuzzFeed team. Once there’s an idea, the creative team will start working on the idea and the sales team will “shop” the idea around to different brands at the same time, Henry said.

From there, once a project finally goes through, Henry will assign a producer and creative director to the project creating a producer-director team. Henry said every project is different, but they will have a producer-director team meeting throughout the creation process until the project is uploaded live.

“When a company comes to us, they’re coming to us with an understanding that we are a creative agency and we understand the Internet and we know what our audience likes,” Henry said.

Clients come to Henry specifically to inquire how much an idea will cost.

“They’ll say, ‘Hey, we want to have an elephant walk through downtown L.A. and we want to put one of our creatives on that elephant,’” Henry said. “I’ll say, ‘OK, well here’s how much it’ll cost to do that.’”
The creative team will produce anything from quizzes to recipes. One of the more recent projects the cobranded team produced was a video called “How many tiny tacos can you eat?” presented by Jack in the Box. Henry also said the L.A. office will produce anywhere from 15 to 20 cobranded projects a month.

As far as pricing goes, Henry said there really is no way to standardize it. Instead, the way he approaches cobranded content is letting clients know how much they can do with a certain amount.

“We just kind of say this is what it costs to deliver,” Henry said. “I mean I guess every media company has a rate card in a sense, but you can never really be that rigid in how you approach clients and rates.”

The BuzzFeed site is also partnering with companies like Amazon for ecommerce opportunities advertising its products with unique links and earning commissions on any

*Figure 7.1* BuzzFeed cobranded video presented by Jack in the Box. From "How Many Tiny Tacos Can You Eat?" by BuzzFeed, 2020. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7VD6omW_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7VD6omW_I).
items sold. A BuzzFeed spokesperson said in a 2019 DigiDay article that the company generated $50 million in ecommerce sales in 2018.

Ethical dilemmas

When it comes to labeling content, Henry said BuzzFeed does not try to hide whether it’s a cobranded piece or not. The cobranded content is labeled with a “presented by” header or mentioned in the headline of the piece. Although the branded content and listicles look and feel similar to non-sponsored content on BuzzFeed’s webpage, each post is clearly labeled. Henry said part of the reason they label their work at BuzzFeed is to treat the audience as they would want to be treated.

Henry said a lot of the people who work at BuzzFeed are just regular consumers of media who have been fans of the publication for years — himself included. He said BuzzFeed labels its work because that’s what the staff would want to see too.
Henry said BuzzFeed also clearly separates staffs, meaning someone on the cobranded team cannot work for the editorial news team. He said, put simply, they just wouldn’t have the time to work both positions due to the intensive nature of the work at BuzzFeed.

Henry said using his experience in agencies around the world, he can confidently say that BuzzFeed processes are equal to any other brand agency he’s worked with. He said the only thing that may cause people to question BuzzFeed’s credibility and sensibility is prestige. BuzzFeed is a younger company compared to others in the advertising world, he said.

“It’s kind of like the movie industry and how they look at Netflix and streaming services, they say, ‘Oh, well Netflix shouldn’t be in any big movie awards because you know they’re a streaming service,’” Henry said. “That’s just kind of like the old guard — not being with the times as much.”
Figure 7.3 BuzzFeed listicle presenting 26 products to help with “winter woes.” From “26 Products that will help solve all your winter-related woes” by Rebecca O’Connell, 2020. Retrieved from https://www.buzzfeed.com/bekoconnell/products-that-will-help-solve-all-your-winter-related-woes.

Figure 7.4 Branded content piece featured on BuzzFeed website paid for by Pepsi. From “A Thank-You Letter to Summer” by Pepsi, 2014, BuzzFeed. Retrieved from https://www.buzzfeed.com/pepsi/a-thank-you-letter-to-summer.
**BuzzFeed sponsored content**

Peretti stated in the “Does BuzzFeed know the secret?” article the audience determines what thrives online — not the message. The publisher also spreads the content. BuzzFeed relies on buying ad impressions and views to optimize effective messages, but it’s the brands that understand the value of native advertising that perform the best, Peretti stated in “Does BuzzFeed know the secret?”

Peretti believes certain people have a skill at creating virality, he said in the article. The reason BuzzFeed works is because people like upbeat, childlike content, the article stated.

The BuzzFeed audience is a significant reason for why much of its content works. BuzzFeed has a record of repurposing old articles that have performed well. Articles like “10 Places You Probably Never Knew Existed” have been re-posted as “28 Beautiful Places You Probably Won’t Believe Actually Exist.”

Critics think this is plagiarized content regurgitated on BuzzFeed’s homepage. However, the reason it works on BuzzFeed is because of the persona the publication has crafted, New York Magazine’s Andrew Rice stated in “Does BuzzFeed know the Secret?”

“It’s actually better for us if people don’t take us seriously,” Peretti said in the New York Magazine article.

Figure 7.6 Listicle with purchase hyperlinks included in the article for users to make purchases through the Amazon Associates Program. From “11 Kitchen Products You’ll Definitely Want On Your Registry If You Love To Cook” by Macy’s, 2020, BuzzFeed. Retrieved from https://www.buzzfeed.com/macys/kitchen-products-youll-definitely-want-on-your-registry.
CHAPTER 8: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON’S HUSKY MEDIA GROUP
(Interviewed University of Washington’s Student Publications director Diana Kramer on Feb. 12, 2020 and student leaders Conner Tee and Isaac Jundt on Nov. 21, 2019).

Husky Media Group is the University of Washington’s version of T Brand Studio. The sponsored content agency ran its first issue in the spring 2019. Isaac Jundt is the student advertising manager for UW’s Office of Student Publications and Connor Tee is the editor of the newly founded Husky Media Group. UW’s independent student newspaper, The Daily, prints once a week and is what most people recognize when they hear about UW Student Publications.

However, The Daily does not print any sponsored content. Along with The Daily, there is a quarterly magazine and HUA Voice podcast available to students. Husky Media Group was created to serve as another form of revenue to the department. Tee said they had seen other schools doing something similar and thought it would be a good concept to bring to UW’s campus.

Husky Media Group now offers three special sections for sponsored content to be printed in: the Major Guide, Housing Guide and Career Guide, each printed in a different quarter of the school year. The special sections are placed on racks and distribution points all over campus and at high-traffic locations in town. UW student publications also has a “street team” that helps with distribution when needed. Diana Kramer, the director of the UW student publications, said they used to insert the special sections in The Daily newspaper but have since stopped doing that to save money and to provide another access point for students to pick up the special section.
“If it’s sitting there, people might pick it up who would never have picked up a paper so there's that,” Kramer said.

Husky Media Group also offers native advertising to be published online under the “Ask the Experts” column on uwdaily.com.

Figure 8.1 The Husky Media Group's Major Guide displayed online. From The Daily by Husky Media Group, 2019. Retrieved from http://www.dailyuw.com/ask_the_experts/.

Figure 8.2 The UW Daily "Ask the Experts" sponsored content section. From The Daily, by Husky Media Group, 2020. Retrieved from http://www.dailyuw.com/ask_the_experts/.
Organizational structure

The Husky Media Group is made up of six writers, two photographers and an advertising team. Every student staff member is paid. The writers are paid by the piece and the editor receives a stipend.

The advertising department is made up of about 10 to 13 consultants who are paid hourly by school requirements, Kramer said. The student staff come from various backgrounds and majors, although much of the advertising staff are business majors and much of the creative staff are public relations majors and similar fields, Kramer said.

Along with her responsibilities as director of UW student publications, Kramer is the sole adviser for all of the publications housed within the department. She said 400 to 450 students go through the student publications program a year. Some of UW student publication’s recruitment comes from mailing an orientation guide home to incoming domestic freshman while others discover student media through advertisements. The Daily’s newsroom and advertising department run ads on a site called Husky Jobs and the publication’s website.

Once hired, the advertising team works throughout the summer “pretty much full-time,” Kramer said. They make calls for a couple days and talk through rejections and brainstorm how to deal with difficult situations but then they start to sell. Kramer said the ad team typically brings in $80,000 to $90,000 during the summer. Kramer said the real issue is in keeping the students when other internships come along. Kramer works very closely with the advertising manager and Husky Media Group editor-in-chief. She said during their term as student leaders, they learn how to manage a team and develop those who work for them.
“So, by the time the leadership leaves us, you know, they can put together a budget,” Kramer said. “They can manage people, they can delegate, they can figure out problems, what happened, how to fix them.”

She said the hard part is they have truly exceptional students.

Tee is the manager of all writers and photographers. Husky Media Group utilizes The Daily’s copyeditors. As for the advertising team, Jundt oversees an assistant sales manager, advertising representatives and a designer. There is also a marketing coordinator on staff who designs the paper in InDesign, fulfilling more of a “design director” position. Technically, this marketing coordinator position falls under the advertising side of things.

Students who work for Husky Media Group are not allowed to work for any other student publications. However, Tee says they are a little lenient on this policy as the copyeditors and photographers who work for him also work for The Daily. Tee said since they are students who are trying to learn, the goal is to limit the amount of conflict of interest as much as possible when it comes to sponsored content.

Kramer said Jundt has also proven to be an exceptional advertising manager this semester by implementing competition into the office this year. Jundt will occasionally say things like, “If we meet our goal, we can have pizza,” or “If we meet our interim goal, Diana will bring in homemade brownies.” And then if they all meet their individual goals and the advertising department meets their overall goals, the entire advertising team will receive Amazon gift cards paid for by the department, which has really boosted morale and transparency in the office, Kramer said.
Kramer said she can walk in the office and see exactly how the advertising team is doing with their goals listed out on a whiteboard for all of student media to see, as well.

**Creative process**

To begin the sponsored content process, the sales team contacts clients they think will benefit from sponsored content. When a client is on board, the ad representative contacts Tee who then assigns a client to one of his writers. At that point, the client is able to contact Tee, the writer, or ad rep depending on what it is they need.

“The way it is now is that all of the ad reps are selling,” Kramer said. “They relay that information to Isaac. Isaac relays it Conner. And Conner pitches it out to his writers and somebody’s gotta pick it up. There’s no shortage of places where disaster can happen.”

Kramer said their hope is to eventually hire one person as a sort of middleman in the sponsored content process. Kramer said they have one individual who is majoring in public relations that would handle all of the client requests when they express interest in sponsored content — serving as the one point of contact for advertising, writing, visuals, etc. Kramer said if it doesn’t work and they need to bring someone else in to help, they will but since the Husky Media Group is still new and still small, she doesn’t think any other student workers will be necessary. This new middleman position would be handling all sponsored content outside of special sections.

The writer is expected to contact the client directly to set-up in-person interviews, preferably. If not in-person, they are instructed to interview sources via phone. Oftentimes, the advertiser has a particular angle they would like to take for the story, but occasionally it is up to the writer to find the story within the client’s interview. Writers
abide by the word count the client paid for and then send the article to Tee to edit. Tee sends the final proof to the client for review and the client will either send edits back for the writer to make or make the edits themselves. Once the piece is sent back to Tee and his staff, the designer receives the piece, which is then slotted in the publication.

The three special sections are filled mostly with sponsored content. However, any extra space in the edition is filled with feature stories following the edition’s theme. The Major Guide was selected to publish in the fall, so underclassmen and new students had something to review when deciding a major. The Housing Guide publishes in the beginning of the winter quarter because that’s when students are typically making decisions on housing for the next year. And the Career Guide publishes in the spring, so it gets in the hands of students as they start to think about graduation.

The timeline for production is the biggest area of growth for Husky Media Group, Tee said. Currently, each special section takes about a month to create before publishing, abiding by the following schedule:

- 3-4 weeks before publishing: Reserve article space for advertisers
- 2-3 weeks before publishing: Confirm display advertising
- 1 week before publishing: All writing, images and display ads solidified and sent to design

After each special section, Husky Media Group follows up with each advertiser featured in the special section by mailing them a copy of the finished product or personally delivering it to on-campus departments.

Jundt said they notify clients about how successful the pickup rate was after a few weeks of being on the racks. He said they also ask clients what they didn’t like about
working with Husky Media Group and what they can do to improve the sponsored content process.

Tee said, in theory, they should start selling advertising and sponsored content in July for all three special sections that way the ad space is reserved. However, the writing process will not start until about four weeks before publication. The problem they encountered was relying on clients to get back in a timely fashion, he said. They have had to decide how strict to be when enforcing deadlines on paying customers because a missed deadline and dropped client is missed revenue for UW student publications.

**Ethical dilemmas**

Husky Media Group has not run into any issues with the newsroom thus far. Both Tee and Jundt said they avoid newsroom conflicts by telling clients The Daily and Husky Media Group are completely separate entities. Jundt said when they’re approaching clients for the different special sections, they are approaching very specific clients to the special section’s theme that the newsroom typically wouldn’t approach to interview. Jundt said they make sure clients know Husky Media Group has no control over how The Daily covers their business. The advertising team instead uses sponsored content as a selling point by telling clients they do have the chance to control their message by purchasing the new service. Although problems with the newsroom have not come up yet, it’s important to remember Husky Media Group has only produced two publications and is a new organization.

Husky Media Group has opted to place bylines on the pieces included in the special sections to recognize writers for their work. They also identify who paid for the piece and whether it was a contributing writer, or a staff writer hired by Husky Media
Group. Sponsored content online is placed under the “Ask the Experts” tab on The Daily’s website, which Jundt said is “a really poor place, but it’s just a place to do it that doesn’t sit next to all of The Daily’s content under their E-editions tag as well.”

Jundt said they tried to place the sponsored content in the most out-of-the-way and unobtrusive place as possible. The placement on the website doesn’t necessarily limit them to only posting one format of a story as they just hired a video coordinator to generate video content, Kramer said in Feb. 2020.

She said the stories found under the “Ask the Experts” tab are stories that advertisers have paid for to reach a college audience on their website. A “branded content” label is placed right below the article title and then proceeded by a “content provided by blank” label.

Jundt said the biggest advertiser for online content is Word Pro SEO, which is an international advertiser that writes its own content and then contacts advertisers to distribute it on different sources.
The first special section

The first special section for Husky Media Group was the Orientation Guide released in spring 2019. Tee said the first publication “left a lot to be desired” and the Major Guide in the fall was closer to what they envisioned but still revealed more needed to be nailed down. One of those things being pricing.

A big mistake Jundt recalled was trying to bundle sponsored content into a package to sell to clients. Jundt said people didn’t like that and wanted to be able to customize what they purchased. Jundt said they realized quickly they just needed to separate the options out and opted to sell very cheap sponsored content. The Major Guide distributed in the fall included 11 sponsored content pieces and was 12 pages long.
Original Husky Media Group sponsored content rates:

- Listicle $50
- 600-word article $100
- 800-word article $125

Jundt said they realized their goal of $10,000 for the Major Guide was impossible with the amount of sponsored content purchased versus display advertising. They had sold way more sponsored content, but the prices were too low to make anything off of it. The Orientation Guide printed in spring 2019 made over $10,000 with a good mix of sponsored content articles and display advertising so Husky Media Group assumed that goal would be realistic again for the fall 2019 Major Guide — it did not. Jundt said they decided to change the pricing structure for the next Housing Guide. Jundt said they decided not to charge clients who had already purchased ad space, but the new prices would be implemented for any new clients.

Husky Media Group’s new sponsored content rates are as follows:

- Listicle $150
- 600-word article $300
- 800-word article $350

Kramer said they did look at other schools when they were creating the pricing structure, but they wanted sponsored content to be in the ballpark of what a traditional ad would cost.

“So, for example an 800-word article is something that we probably would pay a writer $40 or $50 for,” she said. “The freelance rates are really tiny.”
Tee and Jundt said in November 2019 the Major Guide proved to be a huge success with a 70 to 80% pickup rate. They both said the problem with print is you never know if someone picks it up and reads it or just puts it back on the stands. But the following formula from Flytedesk helped them come to this conclusion. Flytedesk is a third-party company working with advertisers and student media across the country to help improve the financial status of student media.

\[
\text{# papers in circulation x 3.64 = # of times publication was read}
\]

Jundt said the only complaint he received when passing out the Major Guide was that some departments on campus were upset they weren’t included in the special section. Jundt said their biggest failure was simply not contacting enough people and giving them the chance to advertise.

Part of the special sections’ success comes from the fact that The Daily was already producing the content before Husky Media Group was created, Kramer said. They had publications like the Housing Guide and Orientation and Welcome edition.

“I wanted a way to get it out of the newsroom,” Kramer said. “So, the newsroom could focus on news and independent journalism and Husky Media can focus on more editorial and paid content.”

Kramer said they learned a lot from the first Major Guide. She felt there wasn’t enough of a mix of content in the first Major Guide. She didn’t think there was enough “value” in it to make someone pick it up.
“There should’ve been something that provided some overarching background or information,” Kramer said.

For example, she suggested a topic like, “some of the places that you can explore on campus to learn more about different majors on campus.”

She said one of the biggest mistakes they made was they didn’t label the sponsored content as sponsored.

“That was a huge fall-through-the-cracks thing,” Kramer said. “So yeah, we learned a lot, and it was our first one.”

Tee said within the first year of Husky Media Group, they’ve also had a hard time working with a designer who works from home. Tee said the designer for the first Orientation Guide didn’t have a desk at the office, and it was hard to double-check certain things in the design when working on tight deadlines. Tee said it was hard to make necessary changes in time, which is why they hired a marketing coordinator for the Major Guide.

Husky Media Group hopes to grow in the coming years into different sectors of media perhaps dabbling in video to give tours of campus housing and working with other departments on campus. Kramer said they hired a video coordinator to develop this area of Husky Media Group in the 2020-2021 school year.
The McKinley Avenue Agency is a strategic communications and media sales agency that partners with Ball State University’s Unified Media Alliance, which includes various student media like the Ball Bearings magazine, Byte, The Daily News and Newslink. The McKinley Avenue Agency also called “the Agency” was founded in August 2017 partially to consolidate budgets in multiple areas but also to give students more experience in a variety of areas. The new strategic communications agency actually combined Cardinal Communications, a small PR agency on campus, and The McKinley Avenue Agency, which handled advertising for The Daily News. The result was coined Cardinal Communication at the McKinley Avenue Agency.

Sponsored content arrived at the Agency in 2017. As a freshman, Hannah Derleth, the current executive director of public relations, was asked to come up with examples of sponsored content to show clients. Derleth got to determine how to price the article, how to write the sponsored material and who to write them for. She set the standard moving forward.

Derleth said they gave away five free sponsored content articles to the Agency’s most valuable clients, both in terms of money spent on advertising and willingness to collaborate. Betsy Meyer, the adviser at the Agency, said when they first started offering sponsored content the Agency created a sales flyer explaining what sponsored content
was, the details, and the price structure, pitching it to all of their current clients since they were already working on contracts for the upcoming academic year.

Meyer said as of Feb. 2020, they only post one sponsored content article per day, so they position it as an exclusive spot on their website to advertisers. She said sponsored content has allowed them to offer one more thing in their contract packages to clients.

“I think more than anything the sponsored content and the sponsored social media has helped us retain clients and retain some of the revenue that we otherwise would have lost,” Meyer said. “Because if all you have to offer is just print advertising and quite honestly online, you know, on your website, it’s not enough.”

Meyer said she saw the biggest drop in revenue in 2015 and 2016, before the Agency started offering sponsored content to clients. She said when she first started at the Agency in 2014 there were only four or five clients signing annual contracts, and now in 2020 the Agency is signing up to 20 clients since starting to offer sponsored content, which is guaranteed money for the entire year.

Derleth said since the first year of sponsored content, the pricing structure has definitely changed but the service, for the most part, has remained the same. Derleth said the way the stories are written has improved by making story angles more complex and more creative.

“There are only so many words that you can use when writing about an apartment complex we have found,” Derleth said.

Derleth said they have started to find alternative sources who may live in the complex and can provide their opinion of the housing option without sounding like an employee for the company.
The Agency only offers online sponsored content, but standard advertising is offered in the student magazine, newscasts, podcasts, videos and more, which the Agency also handles.

Organizational structure

When Meyer first started at the Agency in 2014, the team had 15 student workers. In 2020, the Agency consisted of about 55 students, which are broken up into two levels: associates, who are unpaid student workers and have much less requirements than someone in a paid position, and leadership positions.

Meyer said they offer associate positions for two reasons: to offer positions to as many students as possible and to train their students well enough to move them up into a paid, leadership position.
There are four divisions at the Agency, which are as follows:

- Advertising and media sales
- Creative services
- Marketing and promotions
- Public relations

All associates work within the marketing and promotions division so they can help with street team events. The associates must also be scheduled for six hours a week. Meyer said businesses can pay the Agency to go out and promote their company but there’s only so much money to pay students with, so street promotion just became a part of the associates duties. Many associates have other interests and can help with a lot of internal things, but they’re learning about everything the Agency does while an associate, Meyer said. You have to be an associate first to move into a paid position. The associate position is a portion of the Agency’s training process.

The second level to the Agency is the leadership team and paid positions. There are currently 22 paid positions on staff, including media and sales team members. The leadership team includes:

- A director of public relations
- Director of marketing
- Director of advertising and media sales
- Sales director
- Account directors communicating with nearly 200 clients in the Muncie/Delaware county area of Indiana.
The creative services team is also included in the staff of 55 and consists of three designers and one multimedia director who handles all of the videography and photography for clients.

The Agency receives more applicants who are journalism, public relations and advertising majors compared to anything else because the strategic communications agency is housed in the College of Information and Communication and Media. However, the Agency will hire any and all majors. Ball State University also has a professional selling program, which is where most of the media and sales team comes from, but Meyer said the media and sales team is a different breed.

How they are paid is one example of that. The sales team gets a base pay and bonuses for hitting revenue goals but are not paid hourly. The associates are able to move into sales positions but hardly ever do because they’re training is so different, Meyer said.

She said the Agency also struggles to work around the sales team being a part-time position. She said it’s really hard to find a balance between training people to do the work and actually getting the work done.

“That’s why I’m hoping this associate program, as it grows, will eliminate the need for most training once somebody’s actually in a paid position,” Meyer said.

Prior to the associate program, training was done on the job. Meyer being the only full-time professional would just try to pair younger employees with veteran employees. She said she has always felt it’s easier to learn when you’re just thrown into something.

“If you hire someone out in the professional world, you expect them to have experience and automatically know what you’re doing, but when it’s students who are
actually learning in their classes at the same time you’re expecting them to do the work, it’s not easy,” she said.

The Agency also brings in professionals working in the field to help train students.

Meyer said none of the divisions really struggle with retention though. She said the hardest division for the Agency to retain students is sales partly because of the responsibility placed on this position with high expectations and revenue goals. But she said she believes the Agency is getting better at identifying the students who will be good at sales positions through the questions they ask in interviews and letting students know up front it isn’t a job they’re going to pay rent with.

“Students have learned that this is how you’re going to get a job when you graduate,” Meyer said.

She said one of the things they’re working on now to improve recruitment and retention is reaching out to the alumni of the Agency to get testimonials of what working at the Agency did for them. She isn’t sure how the narratives will be packaged yet but hopes to include it in associate training when they hire new employees. She said she also hopes to promote it to the university to prove the Agency is important and benefiting students’ futures.
The Roost is the Agency’s separate housing magazine that is inserted into The Daily News. In addition, the Agency hosts a “Housing Fair” the week the magazine comes out in one of the dining halls on campus. The Agency gets about 20 vendors together promoting housing options on or near campus.

Grad Wishes is another specialty publication for graduation and is inserted in the very last edition of The Daily News. Grad Wishes lists the names of all of the graduates for that semester. Parents also get the chance to send or purchase a “grad wish,” which is roughly the size of a quarter-page ad with the student’s name, picture and about 50 words for a grad wish message. Advertisers are also able to buy slots throughout the edition.

Best of Ball State is another special edition where businesses can buy in and be considered for different awards.

Much of the sponsored content sales come from what is called “contract credits,” in which sales representatives will approach some of the Agency’s biggest advertisers.
showing them what they spent in the previous school year and try to convince them to buy a similar prepaid package. However, this prepaid package will include more such as contests, sponsored content and/or exclusive sponsorship spots.

Charging for sponsored content for the Agency started as a barter and trade deal in 2017. Pricing then rose to $75 for the client to write the sponsored content story and $100 for the Agency to write the story. Now, the Agency charges $150 for a company-written piece and $200 for an Agency-written piece. Meyer said about 75% of sponsored content sold in the 2019-2020 school year was written by the Agency.

Although the Agency operates separately from The Daily News and other student media, students are encouraged to work in all areas of Unified Media. For example,

![Figure 9.3 American Red Cross sponsored content article. From “Be the hope someone needs this season” by Ball State Daily Advertising, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.ballstatedaily.com/section/advertise.](image-url)
Derleth said one of the designers for the Agency is involved in Unified Media’s Byte podcast.

**Creative process**

Sales representatives are responsible for selling sponsored content. Sometimes clients will have a specific angle or idea they want the Agency to tackle but oftentimes, the Agency is creating the idea. Derleth said it’s never super formal, but the Agency’s PR team will get together and discuss what angles might work for the story idea. Weekly meetings are conducted but meetings are not dedicated to conceiving sponsored content ideas. The ideas are based on what is sold.

Meyer said they haven’t really tried to go after clients with specific sponsored content ideas. They are selling sponsored content as more of an advertising option to current customers. She said they get requests all the time from clients asking questions like, “How do you get a story in the Daily News?” which turns into a perfect opportunity to pitch sponsored content.

All communication with the client goes through the sales team. There are six members on the sales team divided into three teams of two, each with a list of clients they’re responsible for. Derleth said having one main point of contact makes it easier for someone to get a question answered rather than trying to track down five or six people. Meyer said the sales executives are always the first point of contact and doing a majority of the communication with the client no matter what. However, she said the account managers are also a position they created to aid in communication.

Meyer said when they first created the account manager position, they assigned them to specific sales teams and allowed them to only work with clients on that particular
list, but they ran into problems with the account managers only working 10 to 15 hours a week and trying to contact clients on such limited hours. As of Feb. 2020, the Agency only has two account managers but they work with all of the sales teams so they can communicate with clients in the salesperson’s absence.

Besides aiding in client communication, account managers put in all of the sold orders, whether it’s an ad or an online service. They use Ad Manager Pro for all billing and ordering. They also work with the sales team to create briefs and proposals for clients because most of the account managers are advertising majors and Meyer said the Agency tries to give them experiences that will benefit their future careers. Account managers are very similar to a project manager role in a traditional organizational structure.
Client: Buffalo Wild Wings

Background
Buffalo Wild Wings is looking to expand into a new loyal target audience that matches the demographics and psychographics of the 20,000 Ball State University students. This gives the franchise the opportunity to show how they support the school and Muncie community by being the go-to hang out for students and young adults by being more personal. Competition is high in college towns with restaurants and local bars, and we, at McKinley Avenue Agency, have unique ways of reaching the target audience.

Objective
To increase engagement with Ball State students to drive sales and brand loyalty of Buffalo Wild Wings as the top of mind wings, sports and drinks.

Target Audience
Of the nearly 20,000 students on Ball State campus, majority are the perfectly aligned demographic and psychographic for Buffalo Wild Wings. Students care about the support of their school and they want to be the brands to care and value the same values as them. Another plus, majority of the student body is of legal drinking age allowing to create a different experience at B-Dubs. The target audience is all about new experiences at a good price.

Key Message
“We are fans of you”
Young Millennials and Older Gen Z went to support brands that support what they do. From social issues to supporting their favorite sports, Ball State students want Buffalo Wild Wings to be their go to place hang out to celebrate their hometown teams while eating good food and having a cold one.

Placement Strategies
- Social Media
  Buffalo Wild Wings Muncie location has the opportunity to expand its pre-existing Facebook page to involve the students and the community. The Public Relations Division at McKinley Avenue Agency can help create post and provide social media management that stay true to the brand while interacting with the target audience. This will be a platform to measure the success and quality of the post and satisfaction of customers. To become truly competitive in the market, the franchise must stay up to date on this platform. For the younger generations, “91% have seen restaurant content on the platform, compared to 44% of all consumers.”
  In addition to following brands, 39% engage with the brand by posting about their experience online (Mashable).

- Environment
  The environment embodies the hometown spirit of the university at Buffalo Wild Wings, making it different among the competitors. The franchise has the opportunity to stand out among its competitors by reflecting this idea of being there for their target audience at every event. With a wide variety of products, B-Dubs can show off what they have to offer to everyone from football fans to baseball fans. This is a campaign that goal is to gain loyal consumers.

- Spec Ads
  The advertisements need to have a fun, upbeat tone that match the audience and the brand. This can involve the cheerful excitement that aligns with the fan attitude. The advertisements are displaying that “We are a fan of you” attitude. This shows that the brand cares for its customers, and the audience will find appropriation in this as we attempt to get them to be loyal customers. The advertisements should align with all other Buffalo Wild Wings content to have a consistent brand message.

- Timeline
  The campaign will run during January to April and August to December based on the heaviest number of traffic at Ball State studied in the Muncie area. The schedule will capitalize holidays such as National Sports Day (August 29), National Mint Day (March 24) and National Donut Day (April 7). Super Bowl can be a special event for the entire Munson community to drive extra traffic. The brand can involve with of the different sports teams at Ball State to reach a variety of different types of fans through the school year.

Deliverables
- Social Media Content
- Coupon
- Sponsored Content post
- Pop-up
- Digital ads
- Print ads

Proposed Budget
- Total Investment: $4,007.00
- Contract Credit: $561.00
- Total Value: $4,567.00

Figure 9.4 Buffalo Wild Wings creative brief from the McKinley Avenue Agency. Retrieved from Ball State University’s McKinley Avenue Agency.

AMP is an application used to create orders from clients and take notes to pass on to those working on the project. PMP is the application the Agency uses when marking projects ready for client review. Depending on the client, sponsored content articles take 45 minutes to 5 hours to complete. Online sponsored content is written content and photographs are typically provided by the client, which expedites the process. Derleth said four to five hours is the maximum, which includes brainstorming, uploading the finished story to PMP and the website to publish.

After the story is written and posted, Derleth said they don’t typically follow-up with clients about performance but can easily give clients website analytics if they’re
curious. Derleth said one of the main reasons sponsored content is online is because that’s where their viewers live.

**Ethical dilemmas**

Sponsored content published online does not receive a byline for the respective writer. Instead the article names “Ball State Advertising,” which protects the student if they were to work for any other publication or media company.

![Figure 9.5](https://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2019/10/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-workouts)

**Figure 9.5** The McKinley Avenue Agency sponsored content label. From “How to get the most out of your workouts” by Ball State Daily Advertising, 2019. Retrieved from [https://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2019/10/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-workouts](https://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2019/10/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-workouts).

Along with the big black “SPONSORED” label located on each of the sponsored content articles, in an attempt to protect the student newspaper from any conflict of interest, each piece posted on The Daily News website has a disclaimer at the bottom of the article letting consumers know sponsored content does not reflect the opinions of the entire Unified Media Alliance.

![Figure 9.6](https://www.ballstatedaily.com/section/advertise)

**Figure 9.6** Disclaimer at the bottom of McKinley Avenue Agency sponsored content. Retrieved from [https://www.ballstatedaily.com/section/advertise](https://www.ballstatedaily.com/section/advertise).
The Agency sponsored content examples

One of the Agency’s most successful sponsored content pieces was a story paid for by a spring break resort in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Lani Kai Island Resort contacted the Agency to run sponsored content. Derleth said part of the reason it performed so well was because other places in Muncie weren’t going to be advertising spring break resorts.

The pictures provided were “fun and inviting” for college students. Derleth said they received several hundred views in just the first two weeks of publishing. Derleth said she doesn’t know how successful the post was for the spring break resort but because of the positioning online, timeliness and audience awareness, the post performed very well.

Timeliness is a big indicator of success for sponsored content at the Agency, Derleth said. The holiday season brings a lot of potential stories for digital. Derleth said in the past they’ve teamed up with local shops in the Muncie area to publish pieces like “Gifts for your parents” helping students come up with easy gift ideas.

“At that point everyone was looking for ideas because they really don’t want to walk in the door and just give Mom a candle,” Derleth said.

Another success factor for the Agency is adding a human element to the story. The American Red Cross is a pro bono client for the Agency. Derleth said they post sponsored content articles for each blood drive about once a month. Instead of writing the same story each month, the Agency has found interesting subjects making the stories about more than just a monthly blood drive. One student the Agency interviewed said he gives blood any chance he can in an effort to give back because his mom needed several blood transfusions when giving birth to him.
CHAPTER 10: CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY’S MUSTANG MEDIA GROUP  

Mustang Media Group (MMG) is the student-run media agency at California Polytechnic State University. MMG includes: Mustang News, the editorial arm of the organization; MMG Business, which provides print, newsstand and digital advertising for the whole organization; KCPR-FM, the student-run radio station; and CCPR, the public relations and marketing portion of the organization. MMG was created in 2013 bringing all services under one umbrella.

Sponsored content arrived at Cal Poly in 2015 for multiple reasons, said Paul Bittick, the former general manager of Mustang Media Group. Bittick had been following native advertising trends in national media at the same time the former editor-in-chief of Mustang News Jacob Lauing expressed that he wanted to stay involved in student media but did not want to be editor-in-chief for another year. He decided to do his senior project on native advertising and worked with Bittick and his editorial adviser to create the native advertising sector within MMG.

“I guess throughout my college career too, I had kind of been toying the line between traditional journalism, traditional meaning I guess more editorial, and more marketing and communications,” Jacob Lauing said.
Since Lauing’s minor was in integrated marketing communications, native advertising seemed like a good opportunity to combine both journalism and marketing, he said.

Lauing spent the fall quarter researching and writing the paper for his senior project and then spent his winter and spring quarters executing and running the native advertising in-house agency. Lauing said there weren’t any initial metrics for success like increasing revenue by a certain amount of money.

“I think really the only metric for success for us was just produce content,” Lauing said. “Like get things rolling. Have a couple clients who are willing to pursue this as a form of advertising and just have some results.”

Lauing said, if anything, he felt he was just paving the way for future students at Cal Poly and setting an example for other college media publications.

Part of the reason MMG had so much success with the native advertising launch was because their first client came from a background in marketing, Lauing said. She was the marketing director of Cal Poly Corporations, which owned campus dining and the bookstore. Lauing said the marketing director trusted his vision and his ability to execute the project, which made the effort very collaborative.

“Having a client who was willing to pursue this and push the envelope a little bit made all the difference in us being successful,” Lauing said.

The biggest challenge MMG ran into was educating advertising representatives how to communicate the value of sponsored content to advertisers. Bittick said explaining how it could be effective and the great uses for sponsored content continues to be the biggest challenge because businesses still aren’t very knowledgeable about it.
Bittick said revenue did increase in that first year but it wasn’t designed to be a “save-all in terms of revenue.” He said it was designed to be an option for advertisers that could bring them results. Bittick said he thinks MMG completed 8 to 10 sponsored content pieces during the first year, and output has continued to grow steadily each year.

Cal Poly is located in San Luis Obispo with a population of 45,000 people. Bittick said due to the university’s location, sponsored content will never be a big piece of advertising revenue.

“But we’re using new programs where students can learn a different skill set by working with it,” Bittick said. “And also, it keeps us relevant in terms of being able to offer advertisers all sorts of different platforms to advertise on.”

MMG identifies its mission on its website as a way to “help brands engage with audiences in ways that traditional ads can’t.”

MMG offers digital sponsored content to be published on the Mustang News website and printed sponsored content in special and regular editions of the newspaper. MMG also offers underwriting opportunities for advertisers on the KCPR radio station.

When sponsored content is sold. MMG’s in-house native advertising team meets with advertisers to brainstorm ideas, creates the content and uses website analytics to track the success and follow-up with clients about their work. Success to MMG depends on what the clients’ goals are, Bittick said.

“Are they trying to get brand awareness?” Bittick said. “Are they trying to get an immediate response, in terms of customers coming in or a boost in sales of a certain product?”
Bittick said the key thing they try to train their advertising representatives to do is go and meet the advertiser to find out what their goals are.

For example, MMG has a client who owns a hamburger business and runs a coupon ad with them every year. It’s a huge success for the hamburger restaurant because they’re willing to basically give away free food to get people in the door.

“So, their expectation of a return is much different than someone that is running a 10 percent off coupon in the paper on a small ad,” Bittick said. “But they have the understanding, and it’s one of the jobs that we really emphasize working with our students is to understand what the client is expecting as their response to their ad and making sure they have realistic expectations.”

Bittick said although MMG’s branded content program has had much success, they have not reached a point where they can guarantee advertisers a certain response. He said student media is in a unique position in that people don’t go to their website to catch up on everyday news like the New York Times, so it’s important for clients to understand the reach of student media. Bittick said they are very transparent with clients about analytics and how a story has performed. He said that’s one of the benefits to native advertising online:

“It’s like a billboard on the highway as you drive by it and you see a sign for McDonald’s three exits ahead. Then you happen to get off there. Yeah, you saw the sign but you were hungry and so you were wanting to get something to eat, that’s why you got off at that place. But that place has no idea how many people pulled in because of that sign. When you run a native ad, you know exactly how many people actually read the ad. I mean that’s trackable and that’s one of the benefits of it.”
Organizational structure

MMG has an in-house native advertising team with student employees who work for that team only. The native advertising staff is comprised of:

- Branded content editor
- Special section coordinator
- Writers
- Videographer, if needed
- Advertising managers
- Advertising representatives responsible for selling the branded content to advertisers

Bittick said a lot of times, freelance writers are utilized and will take their own photos, which takes the need for photographers out of the equation.

There are 20-plus students on the advertising, business and design staff. There are four or five students on staff within public relations/marketing and 40-plus students on the editorial staff, Bittick said.

MMG’s marketing team is responsible for promoting Mustang News throughout the community and on social media. The audience development manager leads a staff of brand ambassadors who hand out newspapers to students on campus, at events and to businesses throughout the community.

Not all positions are paid, Bittick said. The pay structure is in the leadership roles and advertising representatives are paid on commission.

The in-house native advertising staff can come from any major. But most of them come from journalism, Bittick said. In the interview process, MMG requires students to
show some of their writing samples before they’re hired. Bittick said they want people who have had classes in journalism writing.

It’s very rare for a freshman to be hired because they don’t have the experience and people are paying for the content, Bittick said. On the same side, he said they are students and they’re still learning how to do a lot of things, so there has to be an understanding between the client and the student media organizations that all of the stories are a work in progress and that’s why MMG wants clients involved in the process.

MMG recruits students by stressing how beneficial the experience and knowledge gained at the organization can be to students after they graduate college. Bittick said students aren’t just learning how to do things. They get to produce content and vary their skills through writing different things like sponsored content. Many of the students at MMG are just valuing the experience to add to their resume. Bittick said they understand that it’s hard for a student to know what they want to do after graduation, let alone five years down the road, so MMG just tries to provide as many opportunities and chances for students to be successful as possible.

Lauing, who originally founded the native advertising agency at MMG, now works as an editor at a company called Leaf Group. He said the company is very data driven and focused on search engine optimization (SEO) content. He said his duties now consist of a lot of project management since they outsource all of their writing. However, he said the opportunities and experiences he gained from MMG prepared him for the current diverse journalism industry.
“I think with journalism you’re presented this kind of sobering reality of going into a profession that is inherently unstable,” Lauing said. “And throughout your college career you’re like, ‘OK, but how can I kind of pivot? Or how can I kind of stay desirable to potential employers who aren’t just a newspaper? Who aren’t just a TV station? Who aren’t a digital publication?’”

Lauing said his supervisor at his current position recently told him that part of the reason he was hired was because of the “innovative sponsored content experience” he had at MMG.

Lauing said having a knowledge of journalism, how creating content works and the ability to come up with creative ideas for a client are the skills that bring success when dealing with sponsored content. Lauing said when he was hiring, the “ideal blueprint” for him was someone who was studying journalism but had an interest in public relations and/or branding and wanted to use those skills to work in more of a commercial capacity.

“But having that storytelling experience as I said is like so critical to making this thing work,” Lauing said.

**Creative process**

MMG’s native advertising team is made up of digital storytellers who work with clients to communicate their messages using suitable media types.

If a client is interested in sponsored content or native advertising, the ad representative will let the native advertising leadership know to assign a writer to that client. The writer sets up a time to meet with the client, if they’re local, and the ad rep
who made the sale to go over what the client wants to accomplish with the sponsored content piece.

After the initial meeting, the writer becomes the main point of contact with the client to execute the project. Bittick said if a photographer or videographer is needed, they would coordinate that with the writer. The writer would be the one to send the proof and the draft to make any changes to the piece.

The brainstorming process would occur after speaking with clients to hear their goals. Planning sessions do occur with the special sections, since they are more theme-based. Sponsored content and special sections operate as two separate entities at MMG, which is why there are two different leaders for each division.

Writers that work on special sections will also work on sponsored content. Bittick said some of their special sections are, in a way, a form of native advertising. He said special sections are actually marketed and distributed as an advertising supplement to the Mustang News. The special sections just publish under the Mustang Media Group logo instead of the Mustang News logo.

Advertising representatives work with clients to show them their analytics. Most of the time, it’s very informal with the ad reps showing clients their piece online and then showing them the analytics from there.

It takes the native advertising team about two weeks to complete a sponsored content piece. Bittick said, on average, MMG will produce 10 to 15 sponsored content pieces a year, which generates about $5,000.
The current rates for sponsored content are:

- Online article: $250
- Video services: starting at $150

For print content in either regular newspaper editions or special sections, the advertiser must buy the ad space, which can then be used for sponsored content material produced by a native advertising writer. The special section rates differ depending on which theme advertisers are purchasing.* Special section rates are as follows:

- Full page: $600-750*
- Half page: $350-400*

Regular newspaper rates are as follows:

- Eighth page: $125
- Quarter page: $200
- Half page: $375
- Full page: $725

*Figure 10.1 MMG creative process. Retrieved from https://mustangnews.net/.
Ethical dilemmas

Bittick said there wasn’t really opposition when they were starting sponsored content at MMG. The only concern expressed was that they had to keep it ethical.

“That was one of the biggest problems I saw with native advertising is sometimes readers were confused with it and thought they were reading native content,” Bittick said. “So, we wanted to come up with a program that we would ensure that it would be clear to readers and keep it very ethical.”

Lauing said what helped him as he was starting the program was that he did come from a traditional journalism background as editor-in-chief of the newspaper. He said he had enough credibility to try something like native advertising out. Lauing also said he had a very close relationship with the Mustang News editor-in-chief after him, which helped the new program run smoothly alongside editorial.

When digital native advertising launched in 2015, each story posted on the Mustang News website was labeled “sponsored” in the headline and below the featured image as seen in the MasterCard example below.
Figure 10.2 MasterCard sponsored content mock-up. From “Why you’ll be seeing more native ads on Mustang News this year” by Jacob Lauing and Kayla Messman, 2015. Retrieved from https://mustangnews.net/youll-seeing-native-ads-mustang-news-year/.
Sponsored content as of March 2020 is marked with a small black “SPONSORED” label in the top left corner of the articles. The sponsored content articles also live in a separate tab of the Mustang News website. Recent articles can be found on the homepage. Older articles can be found by scrolling to the bottom of the webpage and clicking the “sponsored content” option in the dark-gray footer. The original disclaimer below the featured image on the MasterCard example is no longer found on sponsored content online pieces.

“If someone is looking at starting native advertising, I would say one, look and find people who are doing it the way you want to do it,” Bittick said. “Don’t spend your time trying to basically create something brand new because there is nothing out there that is totally brand new. And above all else, make sure, make sure it’s ethical.”
MMG sponsored content examples

The types of native advertising MMG offers and has produced in the past include but are not limited to the following: multimedia, written articles, quizzes and alternative options such as infographics.

MMG takes full advantage of the digital space and all of the possibilities it offers, producing things like quizzes and interactive road trip playlists. The advertisements have multiple entry points compared to a traditional display ad, where a consumer may see the logo or image and move on.

A native advertisement like a quiz encourages consumers to engage with the advertisement and moves them through an experience rather than presenting them with a call to action. By the time consumers reach the final question on a quiz, they’ve actively participated with a brand, making native advertising more interpersonal as well.

Figure 10.4 Sponsored content tab on Mustang News website. Retrieved from https://mustangnews.net/section/sponsored/.
MMG is also capitalizing on their knowledge of the Mustang News audience and creating sponsored content pieces that focus on the consumers’ interests and encourage interactivity, compatibility and engagement. For example, the “Chainsmokers soundtrack to your summer road trip” piece, allows consumers to hover over locations on an interactive map and links them directly to the songs on another music application, SoundCloud. The compatibility of this piece proves how effective online sponsored content can be.

![Summer road trip infographic sponsored by the California Mid-State Fair.](https://mustangnews.net/chainsmokers-soundtrack-summer-road-trip/)

**Figure 10.5** Summer road trip infographic sponsored by the California Mid-State Fair. From “Here’s a Chainsmokers song for every destination on your summer road trip” by Ysabel Sullivan, 2017. Retrieved from [https://mustangnews.net/chainsmokers-soundtrack-summer-road-trip/](https://mustangnews.net/chainsmokers-soundtrack-summer-road-trip/).

MMG is capitalizing on compatibility further by making sure to add hyperlinks in sponsored content pieces to connect users to client websites, emails and phone numbers. Consumers are directed from one website to another without ever leaving the ad and they’re doing so voluntarily, which is a huge success for the client’s brand awareness.
Online listicle

The online listicle format uses short headlines to move the consumer through the story. Listicles are shorter in length and typically easier to consume, making them easier for busy college students to skim through online or on their mobile devices.

*Figure 10.6* Mustang Media Group “listicle” example. From “5 things you didn’t realize about Blaze Pizza” by Sophia Bashey, 2019. Retrieved from [https://mustangnews.net/5-things-you-didnt-realize-about-blaze-pizza/](https://mustangnews.net/5-things-you-didnt-realize-about-blaze-pizza/).
Multimedia

Multimedia pieces naturally lend themselves to an online medium. Videos can be embedded directly into the story, allowing consumers to enter the story through the written introduction or by clicking on the video to receive the content that way. Multimedia also makes it easy to share on social media to reach even more of the MMG audience.

Figure 10.7 Video on the three types of pizza sold at Blaze Pizza. From “Three must-try Blaze Pizza recipes you won’t see on the menu” by Maggie Hitchings, 2017. Retrieved from https://mustangnews.net/three-must-try-blaze-pizza-recipes-wont-see-menu/.
Quizzes promote interactivity between the brand and the consumer, even if it seems the brand isn’t completely obvious.

Bittick said the first project they did was a quiz for Cal Poly’s campus dining department asking students whether certain items were recyclable, compostable or trash. Within two weeks, 500 people had taken the test with about 100,000 people on the site that month, Bittick said. A successful click-through rate for a regular ad with 100,000 visitors a month would be 10 click-throughs, which proves just how successful a 500 click-through rate was, Bittick said.

In the Harmony Cellars “Test your wine knowledge for a free wine tasting,” MMG is using the headline to create a call to action. There is an incentive for consumers to take the quiz in the “free wine tasting” but there is also an incentive in the statement challenging consumers to “test your wine knowledge.”
The quiz includes a blurb that links consumers to the Harmony Cellars event calendar, if interested, and their homepage, if unfamiliar with the company.

A quiz is something that doesn’t have to be all about the client. The subject matter can be abstract enough to invite the consumer to participate and include subtle client messages in the quiz questions.

Quizzes also are passive enough to not exhaust the consumers or scare them away from the ad. Quizzes can serve as a form of entertainment and education about the client or brand.
Kent State Student Media turned to sponsored content, like many other college media outlets, to help recover lost revenue, Kent State Student Media client relations assistant director Tami Bongiorni said. Sponsored content was initially only offered in the newspaper. It is now offered to run in the newspaper, all six student-produced magazines and all websites. Sponsored content is a collaborative effort between the sales team, design team and marketing team, Bongiorni said.

Kent State Student Media consists of The Kent Stater, the student-run newspaper, two specialty magazines, an independent film production company, a radio station, a literary and arts journal, an advertising and marketing team, and a TV station.

Bongiorni said sponsored content has grown to be offered on all media partners they produce. She said their pricing structure has also changed after realizing how much time and effort went into creating the work. They have also expanded the program from offering only content and articles to now offering more visual elements such as games and infographics.

**Organizational structure**

Sponsored content at Kent State requires a writer, designer, salesperson and overall manager/director, Bongiorni said. They also have a person on their marketing team who is responsible for organizing, planning and managing each sponsored content piece regardless of the media partner it is running in.
Kent State Student Media typically has freelance writers or marketing team members write the sponsored content, whose majors are typically public relations. The student employees are not allowed to write between editorial and sponsored content. They must choose one. Although most marketing team members come from public relations, Bongiorni said their students come from all different backgrounds — from journalism to fashion merchandising. However, all student workers know how to write and understand the business side of journalism too, she said.

The designers and marketing team are paid hourly with most working 10 to 12 hours per week. The sales team is paid on commission, and freelancers are paid by the piece. Bongiorni said they typically pay $50 to $75 per sponsored content piece. If it is someone who is already on staff, the staff member will clock in and clock out when working.

Bongiorni said they have an overall staff training at the beginning of the semester to welcome students to the staff and offer continued support throughout the semester with full-time advisers helping editing and proofing work.

Advertising training is a little different in that they also train the week before school starts with role playing how to sell sponsored content. In order to stress the value and importance of sponsored content to new student employees, professional staff will emphasize that “these are more invested projects,” Bongiorni said. Thus, the sales team is expected to stress to clients that sponsored content involves “more time, more money, more value,” she said.

The design team will also produce “spec” advertisements in their initial training to practice the different ways to layout content.
Kent State Student Media relies heavily on word of mouth and class visits to recruit new students to apply to all of their media partners, Bongiorni said.

Creative process

The sponsored content process at Kent State Student Media actually starts with the piece already created as a “spec” ad or a mock-up. It’s given to clients in the initial pitch meeting to show them what the native ad could look like.

Bongiorni said this process starts with a brainstorming meeting. Various teams who have a hand in creating sponsored content will be at the brainstorming session to discuss the upcoming special sections and events. The various teams will come up with an idea together and then the marketing team will come up with a concept that addresses that idea, whether it be in graphic form, photographs, or written copy. The marketing team writes the copy and gives it to the designer to create the piece based off the given copy, Bongiorni said.

The sales team collaborates with the marketing and design teams to find clients that best fit the sponsored content piece. The sales team picks a client to place on the final spec ad and takes it to that client to pitch. The marketing manager is overseeing this entire process from start to finish, Bongiorni said.

If the piece does not sell, Kent State Student Media will do one of two things: still run the ad as an editorial piece without the advertiser on it or repurpose it to another media partner and try selling it again, Bongiorni said. They will pay all staff accordingly, whether it is sold or not.
Ethical dilemmas

Kent State Student Media labels its sponsored content with a thin banner at the top of print editions and “SPONSORED CONTENT” printed in bold letters. The client who paid for the piece is also clearly labeled in the banner. The label doesn’t change depending on the media partner the piece is featured in. Online sponsored content also includes a “SPONSORED” label above the headline with the client also clearly labeled underneath.

Figure 11.1 Kent State Student Media flow chart sponsored by Ray’s. From “What beer are you?” by Madison Baughman, 2019.
The perfect way to spend Valentine’s Day

Written by Maddie Baughman

1 You don’t need someone to make you happy!

Just because you aren’t in a relationship or don’t have someone to gift flowers to, doesn’t mean you have to spend the day feeling like you’re missing out. Spend some time treating yourself and appreciating how great you truly are. If you want to focus on you, here are some things to do!

Movie night: Go see the new comedy movie What Men Want. Taraji P. Henson stars as a woman working in an office with all men who receives an unexpected ability that gives her a leg up in her work and love life.

Take out, yum! Don’t forget to utilize delivery when thinking about your dinner plans. Valentine’s Day is the perfect occasion to order some take-out, grab your favorite dessert and spend time doing something you love!

Relax, you got this! Spend the night relaxing and doing some of your favorite things. Treat yourself and recognize your recent accomplishments. Way too often we get caught up in the business of life. Valentine’s Day is the perfect day to remind ourselves we are worth love and it isn’t wrong to want the best when it comes to finding our soulmate.

2 Date Night with your S/O

Valentine’s Day can be a fun yet confusing time when you’re in a relationship. Don’t let others’ thoughts on Valentine’s Day dictate how you want to spend time with your love. If you want to go all out, do it! If you’re not into the mushy-gushy aspect of the holiday, then just appreciate your S/O like you do any other day. Either way, here are some ideas on how to spend the day with your love!

Valentine’s Day Dinner Head to Barrel Run Crossing Winery and Vineyard on Valentine’s Day for the perfect four course dinner with wine pairing. That won’t break the bank! Call 330.625.1075 to reserve your seats.

Roses and Chocolates: The Heart of Kent: The Kent State University Hotel is offering a special romantic evening in the heart of downtown. The Deluxe Valentine’s Day Package includes a standard overnight with dinner for two at the Elephant 10 Restaurant and Lounge and a continental breakfast the next morning.

3 PA Lentine’s Day

Valentine’s Day doesn’t always have to be a day filled with romance, but instead can be a day spent appreciating those around you. Grab your friends and make some memories! Whether you’re choosing to stay in or get out, appreciating your friends is what it’s all about!

Popcorn and a movie baby: The new movie Isn’t It Romantic takes a cynical but hilarious look into love featuring many known actors including Rebel Wilson, Liam Hemsworth, Adam Devine and Priyanka Chopra.

Whoever decided to mix alcohol and sewing is a genius! Kent Fabrics is hosting a Sip and Sew on Valentine’s Day, which will include sewing a heart shaped pillow while drinking champagne!

Game night: Spending your night in? Need to off the wagon in downtown Kent and pick up some fun Valentine’s Day gifts for you and your friends.

Escape Room: Kent’s new live action, fully immersive escape rooms are perfect for you and your friends to try on Valentine’s Day!

Figure 11.2 Kent State Student Media sponsored content label in print. From “The perfect way to spend Valentine’s Day” by Maddie Baughman, 2019.
PART III: A GUIDEBOOK FOR IMPLEMENTING SPONSORED CONTENT IN STUDENT MEDIA
IMPLEMENTATION BY WKU CHERRY CREATIVE

(Interviewed founder/former Cherry Creative director Nicole Childress and founder/former advertising manager Andy Lee on Feb. 5, 2020. I was chosen as Cherry Creative director for the 2019-2020 school year and will be writing the remainder of my research drawing from my own experiences in this student leadership role).

Cherry Creative is a branded content studio and division within Western Kentucky University’s Student Publications operation. The studio was founded in fall 2018 in an effort to generate the revenue lost from declining advertising sales. It was also an effort to create a separate entity to be responsible for the special sections inserted in the College Heights Herald student newspaper throughout the year, taking the responsibility from the newspaper and improving the overall experience for WKU Student Publications’ advertisers, said Andy Lee, the WKU Student Publications advertising manager during the fall 2018 semester.

Lee said the idea was sparked when he sold a sponsored content piece in fall 2017 for the Talisman, the student-run lifestyle magazine, and had to work closely with the magazine’s editor-in-chief to produce the piece. Lee said after the Talisman sale, he and his advertising adviser saw the potential for this type of content and how much extra revenue it could bring in for the entire department.

Thus, Cherry Creative was born. Sam Oldenburg, who was the adviser to the Talisman, WKU’s student-run lifestyle and culture magazine and website, became the adviser to Cherry Creative. Nicole Childress was hand-selected to be the first Cherry Creative director due to her extensive experience within WKU Student Publications on
the editorial side as a designer and her experience in branding and marketing. Childress and Lee met frequently in spring 2018 to discuss the logistics of Cherry Creative, working through questions like: “Could we do this? Could we do that?” And brainstorming the themes of the special sections Cherry Creative was going to take over.

Childress said her focus during the first year was making really great special sections, and she didn’t put as much focus on the possibilities with general sponsored content. Lee said from the very beginning, Chuck Clark, the director of WKU Student Publications, had set the expectation for Childress and Lee to be inseparable. Both said their relationship was one reason why the first year was such a success. Lee said they both had very direct communication styles and were willing to ask questions and approach each other with problems.

**Organizational structure**

The next step for Cherry Creative was establishing a brand. Childress hired a design editor to create the logo and strategically chose someone who was very detail-oriented and had a good eye for branding. She also hired a writing editor and a multimedia editor with a staff of about 2 to 4 student employees under each team leader for the spring and fall semesters. Childress said she started off with two writers for the first semester and had four writers in the following spring along with a new writing editor after the first editor graduated in December.
Along with Lee and Will Hoagland, the advertising adviser, the advertising staff had four advertising representatives that Lee said was a good amount to sell that year.

![Organization Chart](image)

*Figure 12.1* 2018-2019 Cherry Creative organization chart. From Cherry Creative by Sam Oldenburg, 2018.

Childress and Lee both said one of their greatest struggles in the first year was gaining respect amongst the entire department.

“I kept stressing throughout the semester that that’s the language we needed to use – student publications,” Childress said. “We weren’t College Heights Media. We weren’t the Herald. And that was something we really had to work on throwing Cherry Creative into this. The whole student publications family really had to think about branding.”

Childress said they looked at how other college media agencies were doing sponsored content to see how they were casting themselves within their departments.
Some were writing sponsored content behind-the-scenes, almost as if they were “ghost writers,” she said. While others were advertising the agency as its own entity.

Childress believed it was important to have Cherry Creative’s name and logo on things to communicate to the WKU community who they were and what they did. She stressed they weren’t going to get applicants for Cherry Creative if no one knew what Cherry Creative was.

However, it all started from within, and Lee said language was important even in the student leadership titles. Lee was persistent in changing the advertising manager title from “College Heights Herald advertising manager” to “student publications advertising manager” because he believed the Talisman and Cherry Creative were oftentimes neglected.

Lee and Childress said they eventually had to have a meeting in fall 2018 with the entire WKU Student Publications professional staff to fight for Cherry Creative’s name to be branded on the special sections.

**Creative process**

Another issue Lee and Childress ran into in their first year was trying to require a Cherry Creative staff member to attend initial pitch meetings with the advertising representative and client.

Childress said they wanted this approach to work and still think it’s the best approach to sell sponsored content but could not get schedules to align between the creative staff and ad reps. Childress said she also felt like it had something to do with the...
personalities on staff, so they opted to let the ad reps sell individually. Lee said the one
time he did sell with a Cherry Creative team member, she didn’t dress professionally to
meet the client, so Lee and Childress just decided not to worry about it if they couldn’t
get everyone on board.

Another difficulty Lee tried to work on was communicating to Cherry Creative in
a timely manner when sponsored content had been sold. Lee said he had to make it a
requirement for his staff to get the request processed. Childress said through this problem
was when they realized they didn’t even have a request form for sponsored content to be
logged, so they had to find a way to streamline that process. Ad reps, as of 2020, log their
sale in AdPro for accounting purposes, and then submit a sponsored content request form
through the Cherry Creative website, which then sends a confirmation email and all
contact information to the main Cherry Creative email address, accessed by the creative
director.

Childress said in streamlining the process for creative projects, they realized that
there were a lot of steps in the creative process that could seem a little complex to clients.
She said because the advertising representative was the person who initially sold the
sponsored content piece, that’s who the client was used to speaking with. Then, the writer
and photographer would reach out and add to the number of people they were talking to
and then they would receive a final proof from the creative director when the special
section was being put together, which was not ideal for the client’s overall experience.

Childress said they made a document for the client that explained the process at
the end of spring 2019, so they could follow along in the creative process. As of spring
2020, Cherry Creative has created an updated version of this document after realizing what our clients really needed was something with less text and more visuals that could be emailed to them at the start of the process after the ad rep submitted the client’s contact information.

We decided in spring 2020 we thought emailing the client directly from the Cherry Creative account with the creative director’s signature on the email and copying the writer, photographer and ad rep who sold the sponsored content piece would be the best way to get everyone on the same page. The client is introduced to the Cherry Creative email so it’s not unfamiliar to them when the final design proof is emailed to them and all of the creative staff is nudged to start communicating faster and more organically. However, we were unable to find out if this was the best way to communicate assignments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another change in the process Childress said they went back and forth on was the process of pitching stories. Originally, the entire Cherry Creative team would meet prior to creating each special section and start by coming up with businesses who might be interested in buying sponsored content for a certain publication and then they would create the story ideas around those businesses. Childress said the problem with was if the client you structured an entire story around said no, you’re done. There is no pitching that story to other clients, whereas if there was a story the ad reps could pitch to several of the same businesses, there would be a much higher chance of selling sponsored content.
Childress said they switched to a sort of “story-focused” approach to pitching ideas, in which they came up with story ideas that fit the theme of the special section first and then approached more than one client if the ad reps received a rejection from a client.

“Which makes sense,” Childress said. “It’s storytelling. We were focused on, ‘We need to make sales,’ and we were thinking of businesses that would buy rather than. ‘What is good content?’”

Childress said the clients the ad reps sold to weren’t creative people; they were managers and CEOs of companies and didn’t have the creative skills that Cherry Creative staff members had. Refocusing the pitch meetings also allowed Cherry Creative to sell their expertise better to these clients.

As of spring 2020, the agency still structures pitch meetings this way, thinking of stories first and brainstorming businesses suitable for that story second. Cherry Creative also started inviting the advertising team to these brainstorming meetings in fall 2019. However, Lee did attend a couple brainstorming meetings during the pilot year in 2018.

Having the ad staff there helps clarify any questions the creative team has about clientele. For example, only the advertising manager or ad reps would know that it takes longer to communicate with a corporate advertiser like Meijer because there are administrative measures that it has to take to get advertising decisions cleared by its headquarters, who are often not local. Ad reps also know their clients better than the creative team, so they can suggest clients based on demand or the likeliness that they would buy sponsored content. For example, the Lion’s Den was a client who was on a contract with the WKU Herald. The advertising team decided to still honor its contract discount when they purchased the sponsored content piece to be published in the
Talisman, but that was well above its contract total. The idea for this piece stemmed from the advertising manager sitting in on one of the brainstorming meetings, and mentioning this client had a lot of money left in its contract. The agency ended up selling a full-spread story in the semiannual annual Talisman magazine in fall 2019.

After the initial brainstorming meetings happen, the writing editor, photo editor, Cherry Creative adviser and creative director will get together to narrow down story angles and assign writers and photographers from there. What we also started doing in spring 2020 was only assigning one creative team member — either a writer or a photographer — to the sponsored content ideas in the pitch stage so the ad rep isn’t overwhelmed trying to figure out which person to contact. A Google Excel document shared amongst the leadership team was also created to keep track of sponsored content stories. The document listed the assigned creative team members, ad reps and included deadlines, where the story was being published and the story status— whether it be published, pitching or sold.

Limiting the number of people assigned to one story also minimizes the potential scheduling conflicts that could arise. Once stories are assigned and the leadership team has determined an adequate number of stories, the creative staff is given its first deadline. Writers are typically given two deadlines — a first and final draft deadline — and photographers are given one. Designers will occasionally be given assignments in advance if we feel illustrations are needed for a particular story. Otherwise, designers are given their assignments on the night of production when we are laying out and designing the entire specialty publication.
Pay structure

Cherry Creative is fortunate enough to be able to pay the staff for the work they do. Editors and designers are paid a set amount per year or per semester. Editors in salaried positions do not receive additional pay or commission beyond their salary, except in rare circumstances that have to be approved by the creative director.

For editorial content, all staff writers, photographers and videographers are paid by the piece. In fall 2019, Cherry Creative added the “story without sources” category on the standard writing rates to compensate for the Amazon Associate Program listicles the writers started producing for the Talisman website. These stories didn’t include sources and were written using the writer’s expertise of the topic with a clear label disclosing the article’s purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard writing rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blurb (250 edited words or fewer) $4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story (more than 250 edited words) $10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story without sources $7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard multimedia rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single photo $5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo package (3 or more photos) $12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo story (3 or more photos from multiple events/locations) $15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video produced by an individual $15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video produced by a team (split at discretion of editor) $25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full take from an assignment shot for future use $15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12.2 Cherry Creative 2019-2020 non-sponsored pay structure.

Sponsored content compensation is done a little different. Cherry Creative staffers are paid 10 percent commission for all sponsored content. However, that 10% is divided
between the writer and the photographer, if both have worked on the project. The primary individual is the person who had the most contact with the client as determined by the creative director. These rates are subject to change as the creative director deems necessary to reflect the distribution of the work.

**Ethical dilemmas**

During Cherry Creative’s first year, there was a fine line between Cherry Creative and the other publications within WKU Student Publications. Students were not allowed to work for any other publications besides Cherry Creative, Childress said.

Cherry Creative changed the policy in fall 2019 to allow students to work for Cherry Creative and one other publication — either the WKU Herald or the Talisman, but not all three. The change allowed students as many opportunities as possible. The agency recognized students may want to experience other media opportunities besides Cherry Creative, and the students are at a time in their career when they are trying to publish as much work as possible.

Part of Oldenburg’s original thinking, too, was the restriction alleviated some of the potential conflicts of interest a student may encounter if working for outside publications. The policy encouraged them to at least stay under one roof. Finding a balance between allowing for more opportunities but not allowing for too many conflicts of interest was the goal.

However, the decision has caused multiple student employees to feel overwhelmed because of classes, additional jobs and/or extracurricular activities. Changing the policy back to only allowing students to work on one publication staff
could alleviate some of the stress while increasing the editorial credibility of both the WKU Herald and Talisman.

_Bylines_

Another change implemented this year after speaking with many professional media outlets and other college media was removing bylines from sponsored content. The decision was not easy for the staff to make as there were a lot of factors to consider when making the decision such as students striving to get as many published works as possible.

The writing editor spoke very strongly about leaving bylines on the sponsored content pieces to be able to show employers who did the work. The rebuttal was that employers should trust that the work applicants submit is their work.

And in unique cases, Cherry Creative could go back and create a digital version for that person with the byline. The strongest reason to take the bylines off the pieces is that it protects writers, especially because they can work for more than one publication.

Nathan Reese, one of the creative directors at T Brand Studio, said the reason they don’t use bylines is to protect their writers when writing about competitors. Reese used the example of writing sponsored content for Delta Airlines and then turning around and writing for American Airlines. Although Cherry Creative’s client competition might not reach that level, the principle still applies. For example, someone could write a story for the Talisman magazine on Spencer’s Coffee and then have to write a sponsored content piece on Q Coffee Emporium, a direct competitor. That writer’s name is now attached to both, while endorsing one and supposedly writing objectively on the other.

The byline rule change also applies to all staff members who had a part in creating the sponsored content — writers, photographers, designers, illustrators, etc.
Data exists everywhere in the world, from refrigerators to watches. The ability to decipher that data is called "data analytics" and is a skill that students can learn at WKU.

The Information Systems Department of the Gordon Ford College of Business offers courses in data analytics that can contribute credits towards majors, minors or an applied data analytics certificate.

The 18-hour applied data analytics certificate became available to WKU students in fall 2016. The six required classes to obtain the certificate involve statistics, spreadsheets and business data analytics. Students are also required to take two electives, which must be approved by the College of Business and incorporate data in some form.

Information Systems Department Chair Ray Blankenship is excited about the certificate and the opportunities it offers students through improved communication and widespread careers.

"With the applied data analytics, we’re trying to use a couple of our data analytics courses along with some of our elective courses so that students have a better understanding of how they might take data that’s in one area and relate it to another to make decisions,” Blankenship said.

A common misconception about the data analytics certificate is that it only consists of math classes. Although math plays a role in data analytics, there is more to it.

Brandenburg senior Olivia Kessinger said she expected the certificate to be “difficult graphs and complicated information” but it has surprised her in being more business-driven.

“It’s honestly a little bit more creative than I thought because you can interpret data in so many different ways,” Kessinger said. "It’s not just a black and white type of thing."

Kessinger said her favorite part about the certificate has been the real-world knowledge she has gained.

“You can think of data as the new oil,” Blankenship said. "If you have this data, then you can mine this data for information, for knowledge, and do things people hadn’t considered before."

Students who can understand and decipher data have an enormous competitive edge in the workplace, Blankenship said.

"When you go to graduate, you’re going to work for a business,” Blankenship said. "So anything that business is doing – having more knowledge about how to analyze the data and present it and communicate the results of that data is going to make you more marketable than someone that hasn’t been exposed to that.”

For more information about the data analytics certificate visit https://www.wku.edu/bdan/certificate.php.

Figure 12.3 Sponsored content article in “Adulting” without byline.
**Figure 12.4** Editorial article included in the fall “Grad Guide” with byline.
The other challenge college media faces is toeing the line between wanting to be perceived as a professional branded content studio and making sure clients know students are working on the creative projects with a full-time course load and odd schedules. Taking bylines off sponsored content stories made Cherry Creative appear as a more professional studio in that readers are going to trust content more if it comes from a client and an established brand than if it comes from a college writer.

The compromise Cherry Creative agreed upon includes keeping bylines on any editorial content that appeared in the special sections and including a full staff list in the beginning of each special section in order to give writers and photographers recognition.

**Client relationships**

A problem experienced with the newsroom in 2019 was not communicating coverage, which put the agency in a bad position with one of its important clients.

The Kentucky Museum located on WKU’s campus houses six long-term exhibits and has certain rotating specialty exhibits. The museum had purchased a half page sponsored content piece in the newspaper to promote its “Out of the Box” exhibit, showcasing various aspects of Bowling Green culture. However, the features section of the WKU Herald also planned on writing a story about the exhibit at the same time, making it pointless for the Kentucky Museum to purchase advertising space if editorial was just going to cover it for free. The director at the museum contacted the director of WKU Student Publications to inform both publications that his staff had been approached by two different reporters. This situation risked losing a loyal customer and partner to WKU Student Publications by simply failing to communicate across the office.
To fix the problem, a messaging channel was created in which each student leader was supposed to send weekly updates on what was being covered both online and in print if it involved a business to ensure the same story wasn’t being written by more than one publication. The solution was never fully adopted by all publications.

Most of the time, Cherry Creative was the only publication sending updates on coverage. But it was a necessary measure to save relationships with clients and revenue benefiting all of WKU Student Publications.

During the first year of Cherry Creative, Childress said she ran into an issue maintaining client relations when she assigned the wrong writer to a story. Childress said all of the other writers were occupied with other story assignments. However, this writer filed a poorly written story on one of Cherry Creative most important clients and one of the most popular coffeehouses in town, Spencer’s. Childress tried to fix as much as possible, so she could return it to the client for review in a timely manner. She said the client essentially said, “We’re not paying for this,” forcing her to put a new writer on the story to ultimately satisfy the client.

“Our first and foremost is about making the client happy,” Childress said. “As much as I love my staff, and I want them to learn and I want to take care of them, the client is my number one priority.”

Childress said she still talks about the Spencer’s failure in job interviews. She said there were times Cherry Creative failed, especially early on, but she knew in the end, it was going to be worth it. Childress said:

“I knew I wasn’t going to be able to do everything I wanted Cherry Creative to be in that first year. It needed to grow at a natural pace. If we just like ran head on and tried to do it all and all that it had the potential to be in that first year, then we...
would fail. And so, that’s why you build that strong foundation. When you’re thinking long-term like that, you’re thinking more about “How can I make this a sustainable business?” Not “How can I accomplish everything I want to?” I was always thinking, “I’m going to pass this on to somebody. What am I going to give them?”

**Cherry Creative’s second year**

In Cherry Creative’s first year, the first special section, “FIT,” increased sales from $850 in 2017 to $3,880 in 2018. Lee said that’s when he knew Cherry Creative would be a success.

Cherry Creative’s 2019-2020 revenue numbers were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020. Because some of our clients were unable to pay the advertising costs after being forced to close down, some of the publications were unable to be printed.

However, FIT was still posted online so that Cherry Creative staff members could have a place to link people to their work.

The Best of the Hill special section is a special publication that showcases the “best” places in Bowling Green — from best restaurants to the best car wash. The categories are voted on by the WKU community, which includes students, faculty, staff and anyone who accesses the survey link. As a way to support the local business affected by COVID-19, we still posted the first, second and third place winners to the WKU Herald and Cherry Creative social media platforms. We also created a webpage with the winners on the WKU Herald website and provided a link to the Best of the Hill winners webpage in the weekly WKU Herald newsletters.

Because spring commencement was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cherry Creative was forced to get creative in brainstorming possibilities for the spring
graduation special section. The studio was already planning on including the graduation ads in a print edition, so it was just a matter of transitioning them online.

After hosting various Zoom video conference calls, the Cherry Creative team came up with a solution. The team decided to create a digital graduation publication using a WordPress template and conducted interviews for the remaining publication by phone and email correspondence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>2018-19</th>
<th>2019-20</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>View of the Hill</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>24,540</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupon Book</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homecoming Guide</td>
<td>5,625</td>
<td>5,952.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit</td>
<td>3,880</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2020 would have been 2,340 without COVID-19 pandemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulting Guide</td>
<td>2,960</td>
<td>3,195</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Graduation Guide</td>
<td>2,420</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing (Guide &amp; Fair)</td>
<td>16,950</td>
<td>19,150</td>
<td>Includes housing videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best of the Hill</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Due to COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Graduation</td>
<td>3,850</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining Guide</td>
<td>14,395</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>The next dining guide will count as 2020-21 revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald Print &amp; Online</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1,095</td>
<td>19-20 includes Love Notes, Kentucky Museum Print on 9/10/19 and Nat's online 10/4/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talisman Print</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12.5* Cherry Creative revenue numbers for the first two years.

We did manage to increase revenue on every publication for the 2019-2020 school year except for the publications impacted by COVID-19 and the coupon book. Coupon book advertising was sold during summer 2019 before 2019-2020 Cherry Creative staff arrived on campus. Our largest revenue increase was in our Housing Guide and Fair. We increased revenue by 13%, which I believe has a lot to do with our new video feature added in 2020. This video feature was offered to the apartment complexes who had already paid for a package to be at the Housing Fair and for $350 more they
could receive a video highlighting their complexes for personal use. The WKU Herald also posted the videos to its website and social media.

One thing that didn’t change in Cherry Creative’s second year was sponsored content rates. Half-page sponsored content in the WKU Herald costs $500 for black and white and $650 for color.

In the Talisman magazine, sponsored content costs $1,500 due to the higher quality of the magazine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Heights Herald</th>
<th>Talisman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print - $500 black and white, $650 color</td>
<td>Print - $1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half page, approximately 500 words and one photograph</td>
<td>Two page spread, approximately 400-600 words and 1-3 photos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online - $350</td>
<td>Online - $350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 500 words and 1-3 photographs, stays online for three months and shared once on social media</td>
<td>Approximately 500 words and 1-3 photographs or illustrations, stays online for three months and shared once on social media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View of the Hill</th>
<th>Special Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print - $1,000</td>
<td>Print - $500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One page, approximately 400-600 words and 1-2 photographs</td>
<td>Full page, tabloid size, approximately 400-600 words and 1-2 photographs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12.6* Sponsored content pricing for 2019-2020 school year. From 2019-2020 Media Kit by Craig Ostertag, 2019.

During the second year, the studio changed the order of the special sections and turned its attention to producing more sponsored content that could be posted online or in print at any time because one of our new special sections failed in the fall 2019 semester.

During a leadership meeting in 2019, the studio also created a list of expectations for the staff, editors, creative director and adviser, and goals it hoped to achieve in the 2019-2020 school year. It also workshopped a mission statement for the branded content studio.
Cherry Creative’s mission statement states sponsored content will:

- Offer creative solutions to help businesses target a crucial audience
- Produce insightful and impactful media that reaches viewers on a much more individual level than traditional ads
- Abide by the same quality standards as the College Heights Herald and Talisman
- Be properly and clearly labeled to be transparent for readers

2019 Fashion Festival

During the first few months of the second year, the Cherry Creative team was planning to debut its first-ever fashion magazine after seeing so many other schools have success with their fashion editions. The creative team was brainstorming editorial content and sponsored content while the sales team was using the story ideas to pitch to clients. A creative team member attended the pitch meetings whenever possible, but because much of the staff was new, they were less eager to jump in on sales.

Cherry Creative attempted to package advertising sales for the fashion magazine with a fashion “festival” or fashion show with vendors and themed outfits set to happen in October 2019 on South Lawn, one of WKU’s main gathering places and at a time of the year when back-to-school fashion is trending. The branded fashion festival was to be presented by the Talisman instead of the WKU Herald because it fit more with the Talisman’s messaging and content.

The main response from local boutiques was they couldn’t afford the prices. It was also hard for the advertising team to sell something that hadn’t existed before.

However, one clothing store signed on with Package B, offered for $1,000.
For a lot of branded content agencies within college media that I talked to, they were just revamping successful special sections and trying to improve them.

Cherry Creative directors should consider starting small when introducing new special sections instead of trying to do everything all at once. Something more realistic for a fashion-themed publication might focus on print only at first. Once a few years pass with good work and a reputation to showcase with the fashion magazine, a fashion show to accompany the already established magazine could be more feasible.

General sponsored content

In order to salvage the fashion publication and fashion show, Cherry Creative and the ad staff believed five boutiques were needed to be interested and only one boutique signed on. So, we moved forward with brainstorming more general sponsored content ideas to be featured on the Talisman or WKU Herald website, or in print in the WKU Herald or semiannual Talisman magazine.

Cherry Creative sold its first sponsored spread in the seventh issue of the Talisman. Every Talisman is themed and this one happened to be “balance.” We sold the sponsored content story to the Lion’s Den, which sells adult novelty items, and centered the story around gaining confidence in your sexuality and your own skin.

Another online sponsored content piece for the WKU Herald used fall break as its main selling point.
nearly $900 on one spread. Cherry Creative tried new things with its special sections, too. One sponsored content piece that had multiple sponsors won second place for “Best Group Promotion” in the College Media Business and Advertising Managers (CMBAM) contest. The designer illustrated local bars on a map for the Homecoming special section, and each bar paid $100 to be on the map. The main reason this sponsored content was so successful was because the designer illustrated the bars in advance, so the ad rep could show the business what it would look. It’s hard to say “No” when you see your bar as a cute, little illustration amongst all of your competitors. The bar map featured nine bars, making nearly $900 on one spread.

Taylor Gossage, a sophomore from Russell Springs, began to explore her sexuality when she came to college. “I never even thought about boys before I came to college,” Gossage said. She came to Lion’s Den last year with her friends to look around and ended up coming back.

Gossage’s thoughts on sex revolved around pregnancy. After her parents separated, she mostly lived with her mom, whose only infamous “talk” did more than just educate her on her sexual maturity — “If you have sex and get pregnant, you will not live in this house.”

The Lion’s Den, located in Upton, sells adult novelty merchandise while also educating people on how to comfortably express themselves and their sexuality — a combination of a vibrator and cunnilingus toy. The Lion’s Den’s bestseller, according to Lion’s Den corporate marketing manager Alicia Dunlap, is a pleasure product called Her Ultimate Fan.

Cherry Creative tried new things with its special sections, too. One sponsored content piece that had multiple sponsors won second place for “Best Group Promotion” in the College Media Business and Advertising Managers (CMBAM) contest. The designer illustrated local bars on a map for the Homecoming special section, and each bar paid $100 to be on the map. The main reason this sponsored content was so successful was because the designer illustrated the bars in advance, so the ad rep could show the business what it would look. It’s hard to say “No” when you see your bar as a cute, little illustration amongst all of your competitors. The bar map featured nine bars, making nearly $900 on one spread.


Figure 12.7 Lion’s Den sponsored content piece in “Balance,” Talisman issue 7. From “Delving into the dirty” by Sydney Jones, Hannah Vanover and JB Carter, 2019.
Creating mock-ups in advance and approaching clients with an idea of what their content would look like increased the chance of making a sale. After having so much success with the “WKU Homecoming Bar Map,” the agency decided to create another sponsored content piece for another local bar — a flow chart to help students identify what drink they would be if they were to choose an alcoholic beverage at a certain bar.

In the “Which Brew Co. Underground drink are you?” flow chart, the designer customized the answers and the questions to the bar approached for the sale. Specific drinks like the “Caprimoon” and the “Amaretto Sour” were popular drinks of the new bar in the main square of Bowling Green.

The client loved the flow chart and expressed interest in sponsoring it, but, as of April 2020, the sale hasn’t been confirmed yet.
**Sponsored housing videos and Housing Fair**

Another big change made in the second year was hiring a video coordinator in an attempt to fill a demand. The video coordinator had one staff member helping film and edit any videos purchased by a client. In the first semester, this involved brainstorming potential clients and creating a mock-up video to help sell. Cherry Creative created its first mock-up video in September 2019 for VeoRide, an electronic scooter and bike company. VeoRide bikes had recently arrived on campus and were getting more and more popular among students. For the 2019-2020 school year, videos cost $350, which was equivalent to a standard online sponsored content piece on the WKU Herald. But VeoRide couldn’t commit to a video at the time.

*Figure 12.9* VeoRide spec video presented to client. From “Cherry tried: VeoRide” by Hayley Watson, 2019.
The video coordinator position from there evolved into more of a social media and video coordinator position.

Cherry Creative sorely needed a social media presence. It was important to have some kind of profile to get the brand out even more to the student body. Instead of trying to be active on every platform, the focus was on just one social medium at a time — Instagram first. Through Instagram, we were able to re-post sponsored content and tag client partners. It allowed sharing of editorial content and featuring staff spotlights to give the brand a face behind the name too. This encouraged friends of people on staff, other WKU Student Publications employees and our clients to follow along with us on social. Hayley Watson, the video coordinator, then took over creating a social media calendar to plan posts and made sure the content got posted. This became a good responsibility for her to take over while video requests were slow.

While the video sales wouldn’t take off immediately — like the fashion special section because it was something new — we believed one sale could get the ball rolling. The second semester provided the perfect opportunity for video, which was in conjunction with the housing special section.

One of Cherry Creative’s greatest successes during its first year was the first-ever WKU Housing Fair hosted in conjunction with the “Housing Guide,” that was previously created by the WKU Herald. After talking to other college media, the WKU Student Publications professional staff realized housing fairs were proving to be a huge financial success at other schools and was something we weren’t already doing. The professional staff saw a need on WKU’s campus for some kind of event that provided students with information about housing options.
Clark, WKU Student Publications director, and Hoagland, WKU Student Publications advertising adviser, contacted WKU’s Housing and Residence Life (HRL) department to make sure an idea like this would be possible. The professional staff thought it was important to have HRL’s support. Sherry West, WKU Student Publications operations coordinator, contacted other schools through the CMBAM email listserv for inspiration and advice. And Oldenburg researched how the event was conducted at other schools.

The only request HRL had was they wanted WKU Student Publications to include required housing exemptions somewhere in the printed Housing Guide so apartment complexes couldn’t sway ineligible students to move off-campus.

Eleven clients signed up for the first-ever Housing Fair in 2019. Ten clients purchased packages for the second year. There were five packages for advertisers to choose from, ranging from $500 to $2,500, which stayed the same from the previous year. We advertised the most premium package, package A, as an exclusive because there were only four spots available on the venue’s first floor. All four of the premium packages were sold with a couple clients who purchased ads not included in the packages.

WKU Student Publications earned over $15,000 in additional revenue from the Housing Fair in 2019. In 2020, the Housing Fair generated $19,350, just $650 shy of its goal. Part of that contribution was the four housing videos Cherry Creative sold. Branded as “WKU Apartment Hunters,” the four videos were structured similarly to the hit TV series “House Hunters.” Watson modeled her video sequencing, frames and editing on
the show. Each video was about 1.5 minutes to 3 minutes long, and all started with the same introduction and closing.

Figure 12.10 "WKU Apartment Hunters" introduction. From “WKU Apartment Hunters” by Hayley Watson and Lauren Bond, 2020.

The apartment complexes were very pleased with the outcome of the videos and eager to share them on their own social media and websites.

Part of the reason the marketing for this add-on was so successful was because the apartment complexes were so competitive. Once an ad rep mentioned one video had been sold, the others came on board. The goal at the start of the year was to create three videos per semester, and although the effort was slow to start, the agency met its goal the second semester even with the COVID-19 crisis and on-campus closures.
Here are three of the Housing Fair survey responses Cherry Creative received from clients over the past two years:

“Overall I think the Housing Fair was a phenomenal idea and a huge success. I truly hope it's something that WKU continues to keep in place.”

“I would LOVE to have 2 housing fairs a year.”

“I think a fair in the spring is good, but I am sure we would participate if you did one in the fall as well. We got a few more questions about utilities this year, and the students seemed to appreciate the vendors who were there.”

Amazon Associates Program

Another experiment in fall 2019 was a program BuzzFeed utilizes called the Amazon Associates Program.

The program allowed creation of list-formatted stories with custom hyperlinks that would take a reader to the product on Amazon’s website. If the user made a purchase using one of our custom hyperlinks, Cherry Creative would earn a certain percentage of the sale.

Certain types of items earned a greater percentage of profits, so strategic lists could be created, with luxury beauty being the greatest rebate percentage at 10%.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Category</th>
<th>Fixed Standard Program Fee Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luxury Beauty, Amazon Coins</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture, Home, Home Improvement, Lawn &amp; Garden, Pets Products, Pantry</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headphones, Beauty, Musical Instruments, Business &amp; Industrial Supplies</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors, Tools</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Music, Grocery, Physical Mask, Handmade, Digital Videos</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Books, Health &amp; Personal Care, Sports, Kitchen, Automotive, Baby Products</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon Fire Tablet Devices, Amazon Kindle Devices, Amazon Fashion Women's, Men's &amp; Kids Private Label, Apparel, Amazon Cloud Cam Devices, Fire TV Edition Smart TVs, Amazon Fire TV Devices, Amazon Echo Devices, Ring Devices, Watches, Jewelry, Luggage, Shoes, and Handbags &amp; Accessories</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmazonFresh, Toys</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC, PC Components, DVD &amp; Blu-Ray</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Televisions, Digital Video Games</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Video Games &amp; Video Game Consoles</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Cards Wireless Service Plans; Alcoholic Beverages; Digital Kindle Products purchased as a subscription; Food prepared and delivered from a restaurant; Amazon Appstore, Prime Now, Amazon Pay Places, or Prime Wardrobe Purchases</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Categories</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 12.11** Amazon Associates Program fixed product category fee rates. From “Associates Program Standard Fees Schedule” by Amazon, 2019. Retrieved from https://affiliate-program.amazon.com/help/node/topic/GRXPHT8U84RAYDXZ.

Upon enrolling, the agency got 180 days to make a sale using one of the custom hyperlinks. The program also made sure every affiliate of the program clearly stated a disclaimer: “As an Amazon Associate, I earn from qualifying purchases.” Amazon includes example disclaimer statements for affiliates on its site and offers help in its resource center.

Cherry Creative includes a disclaimer statement at the very beginning of each article that states:

“The Talisman may collect a share of the sales or other compensation from the links on this page. Take advantage of being a student: Use this link to sign up for Amazon Prime Student and get the first six months free. You’ll receive products faster with free shipping and access to streaming services and more exclusive deals and discounts.”
Figure 12.12 Amazon Associates Program listicle with disclaimer. From “10 things to help you be a better you” by Jess Brandt, 2019.

Figure 12.13 Custom hyperlinks direct users to products on Amazon's website. From “10 things to help you be a better you” by Jess Brandt, 2019.
Cherry Creative wrote five listicles for the Talisman website, but unfortunately did not make a sale within the time frame given by Amazon, so it was dropped from the Associates Program.

Enrolling in the program though proved a good experience for writers and photographers. Most of them enjoyed pulling from their expertise to write about topics that interested them such as room décor, self-care practices and beauty products. The agency did report on a lot of beauty products and could have offered more variety in articles for the Talisman audience. The category fee rates dictated what we reported on. Instead, we should have focused on the products our audience might care about and purchase and diversify content more.

**Valentine’s Day love notes**

Another success in 2020 was producing sponsored content but in a more creative way with a campaign called “love notes.” These messages were sold a little more than a week before Valentine’s Day for $5. The message could be up to 15 words with one photo and would be included in the WKU Herald print edition the Tuesday before Valentine’s Day. The “love note” would also be featured on the WKU Herald Instagram story. A form accessible by a QR code and hyperlink was created on the WKU Herald website. In total, 17 “love notes” were sold, eight to the same client.
Figure 12.14 Love note handouts with QR code for purchasing. From Cherry Creative by Ashlyn Crawford, 2019.

The design team came up with a marketing campaign for this effort to pass out flyers in one of the high-traffic areas of campus. We allowed students, faculty and staff purchase “love notes.”

Challenges included selling to student organizations, which purchased a majority of the love notes for a political campaign to discourage students from voting for Mitch McConnell. The love notes did fit the theme of the page, since the client designed them to look like Valentine’s Day cards, and they were a paying customer, so we didn’t see anything wrong with allowing them to be on the page.

A disclaimer should have been printed in the WKU Herald to let readers know the “love notes” page did not reflect the editorial decisions or opinions of the editorial staff. This would have been caught if a student from the WKU Herald was more involved in proofreading or copyediting the love notes page. It also may have been caught if the page had been laid out days before the press deadline. But because the idea developed without
a lot of notice, the timeline was pretty tight. Fortunately, social media posts did include the disclaimer.

![Image of WKU Herald Instagram story with disclaimer]

*Figure 12.15* Love notes shared on the WKU Herald Instagram story with disclaimer.

**Graduate Gallery ads**

A more recent change Cherry Creative tried in fall 2019 but didn’t have enough time to implement was selling baby advertisements to parents of graduates for the spring “Graduation Guide.” We didn’t have enough time to get the emails out to parents in the fall because it took longer than expected to set up credit card transactions online in accordance with university procedures.

We created mock-ups to show parents and made a plan to set up a form on Wufoo for the parents to select everything from font choice to color theme of the graduate’s ad.

Since we had done all of the preparation in the fall, we believed the spring semester would work. However, the COVID-19 crisis hit, and all in-person classes were canceled for WKU students, which also postponed commencement. Cherry Creative was forced to conduct all staff and leadership team meetings via a video communication.
service to come up with an innovative way to present these graduation ads. The solution was to move the graduation publication completely online using a WordPress template to present the ads.

Figure 12.16 Graduate Gallery preview website for parents and students to view before purchasing an ad. By Cherry Creative, 2020.

We created sample graduation ads to make the website looked as authentic as possible and sent a mass email out to half of the parents of graduating seniors and the seniors themselves. We created a tab for each college at WKU. This made it possible to filter the students by their academic college. Parents and students were able to select from three packages all depending on how many photos they wanted to submit. One photo cost $15; two photos cost $20, and up to 10 photos cost $30.
We told parents and students the website would be up indefinitely, so they could share posts for years to come. Our hope was when creating it that Cherry Creative could continue this effort and create a tab for each graduating class.

The template we chose also had share features for parents and students to celebrate their students virtually on social media. We also included tags to help people using a search function to find graduates by using student organizations, academic colleges and groups on campus to help narrow the search. The website offered a print feature too, which we designed so someone could produce a copy of the page.

*Figure 12.17* Potter College of Arts & Letters category tab on the “Graduate Gallery.” By Cherry Creative, 2020.
Figure 12.18 Sample graduate advertisement featured on the “Graduate Gallery.” By Cherry Creative, 2020.

Figure 12.19 Sample student post for the "Memories" tab on the “Graduate Gallery.” By Cherry Creative, 2020.
All in all, I think the online Graduate Gallery was more marketable to parents because it was online, and it was able to be shared with family members and friends in a time of crisis. It allowed graduating seniors and parents to celebrate achievements in spite of the unfortunate circumstances.

**Future Cherry Creative recommendations**

As of 2020, Cherry Creative has only existed for two years, meaning its identity could change completely in the next two years. I think one of the most exciting things for me as a student leader was that I knew I could have an impact on the organization and help it grow. Cherry Creative has the ability to become whatever students want it to be, and that’s why I think these guidelines can help.

1. **Enforce the “one publication staff only” policy**

   Students should only be allowed to work for one publication. Working on two media platforms increases chances of running into a conflict of interest with stories. Although the WKU Student Publications holds students to the highest quality standards, these are students, and some are not mature enough to recognize a conflict of interest in the business setting.

   Cherry Creative also uses a hybrid writing style. Staff are writing and photographing on behalf of a client. This differs largely from the objective position the WKU Herald and Talisman writers take. By separating the staff, students can master one format instead of dabbling in all three.

   Cherry Creative had eight student employees quit in the 2019-2020 school year due to an overwhelming amount of work — four of which were working on another staff
within WKU Student Publications. Limiting the number of teams can help prevent overcommitting, as some young professionals do.

Finally, creating a one-staff policy will increase the credibility of all three publications by removing any sort of advertising influence perceived.

2. No bylines on sponsored content

Removing bylines from sponsored content during the 2019-2020 school year was the right decision to increase the credibility of our brand. The reader is able to consume the content as if it were coming directly from the client. Rather than judging the work by a name they may not recognize, the reader sees a product professionally done by an agency they might want to know more about.

Removing bylines also protects the writers if they are ever put in the position to write about competitors. There are a lot of restaurants in the Bowling Green-Warren County area — pizza businesses, multiple churches and plenty of fast food chains, etc. In Cherry Creative’s first year, it sold two sponsored content pieces to pizza businesses in the 2018 Homecoming publication. This wasn’t the intention, but it was clients who were willing to pay, so the advertising team didn’t turn them away. Removing bylines would have protected the writer or photographer if they had been assigned to both stories.

3. Get the right people on board

Both Lee and Childress said one of the most important things they learned in Cherry Creative’s first year was how important it was to get the right people on the team.

Recruitment and retention are popular words in higher education. WKU Student Publications is a great avenue for students to get involved and to gain the experience and
knowledge needed for the professional world. It’s getting talented, curious and hardworking students in the door that’s the challenging part.

In 2019-2020, we had the hardest time recruiting for our advertising team. Cherry Creative luckily functions well with a small number of people compared with the WKU Herald and Talisman staffs. However, recruitment needs to come from journalism, photojournalism and especially public relations classes.

The writers Cherry Creative needs should have some knowledge of AP style, journalistic writing and reporting skills, but they also need some business knowledge or, at least, an interest in it. Cherry Creative offers a unique opportunity in that the staff works with clients and maintains relationships that generate revenue for the entire WKU Student Publications operation.

The business-side of Cherry Creative is too important for an employee not to understand. This doesn’t mean the staff has to know everything there is to know about marketing and sales, but it needs to be aware that it’s a part of the job, and it needs to be excited for the unique opportunities Cherry Creative offers.

Photographers need to come from the Photojournalism Department within the School of Media, or they must demonstrate extensive experience with photography and/or videography. The assignments are for a client and require the ability to troubleshoot lighting, understand camera settings and framing. These are all taught in the Photojournalism Department.

Designers have typically come from the advertising and/or art major with an emphasis in graphic design. Designers should show some experience and/or desire to learn layout. In 2019-2020, Cherry Creative incorporated more illustrations in its
publications, so any student who shows talent in illustration should also be very competitive in the application process and an asset to the team.

The advertising team has recruited heavily from the Gordon Ford College of Business in the past, Lee said. Advertising representatives require lots of training, but the best determinant of success for this role is persistence.

I came into the creative director role with no previous experience in sales but assisted on multiple pitch meetings. As long as the individual believes in what Cherry Creative and WKU Student Publications is doing, the ability to persuade a client to purchase an ad comes with the passion of the staffer. Persistence is what closes the sale.

4. Implement a model release form

As a branded content agency, we operate differently than the WKU Herald or the Talisman. Our operations require us to communicate more with our clients. A model release form is an important form of protection.

During the fall 2019 semester, Cherry Creative ran into an issue with the Lion’s Den sponsored content piece. The writer had interviewed more than one person in the story, and it wasn’t until after the story went to press anyone considered legal protection. We were searching through text messages and email threads to make sure we had proof that we had made every person in the story and photographs aware that this piece was sold to a sexually-oriented business.

We found text messages that we could have used in the worst-case scenario, but we realized the need for a formal and legal way of protecting ourselves.

Model release forms are simple and state the subject is aware that the story is paid for on behalf of a client. It’s important to protect both the writer and WKU Student
Publications because sponsored content could result in a lawsuit. The model release form is good practice for Cherry Creative and replicates professional standards.

5. Create regular joint advertising and Cherry Creative staff meetings

Each 2019-2020 semester, I invited the advertising manager to Cherry Creative’s brainstorming meetings. Both semesters, although the ad manager had changed, both student leaders said the meetings were helpful in pitching sponsored content to clients and in coming up with ideas. The Cherry Creative staff was able to express its ideas, instead relaying them from the creative director on a piece of paper. And the ad manager was able to provide insight for the clients and staff, including: letting the creative team know if a certain client would be willing or hesitant to advertise; details about communicating with certain advertisers such as McDonald’s, a corporation with multiple levels of approval; and advertisers with year-long contracts and money unused.

During spring semester 2020, we had the advertising manager, advertising adviser and advertising representative attend the meeting. Joint meetings with the complete advertising staff help everyone get to know each other, become more comfortable during pitches together and communicate without being nudged by an editor.

Joint advertising and Cherry Creative staff meetings are essential for the two entities to reach their full potential. It’s what the branded content agency was built on when Lee and Childress were chosen for their positions and told they ought to be attached at the hip by Clark, the director of WKU Student Publications. Just like the creative director and the advertising manager’s relationship, the two teams should work as one.
6. Make client relationships a priority

Maintaining client relationships is Cherry Creative’s top priority. Cherry Creative functions as a branded content agency providing a service for a paying client. Cherry Creative does not exist if advertisers don’t pay. So, although I would love to say telling honest and truthful stories is the studio’s number one priority, it’s not. That’s why WKU the WKU Herald and Talisman exist. For this reason, communication with the client is equally important as it is with the advertising team.

In 2020, I started a new system to streamline communication and make sure sponsored content was addressed and assigned within 24 hours of receiving notice, which I think is worth implementing and trying out in future years. Once I received the sponsored content submission, I contacted the client directly from the Cherry Creative email, the same account that would contact them with the final design proof for review. What this does is, similar to the joint staff meetings, get everyone in the same room — virtually.

In the email, I thanked the client for purchasing sponsored content and let them know who their writers and photographers were, and that their team would contact them to coordinate a meeting. I introduced the client and copied the team on the entire message thread, so the students’ emails would be familiar to the client. I also let the client know they would receive a design draft from me, the creative director, and when they would receive it. This date was easy to determine because it is always sent out the first night of production. We let client know in advance it is a quick turnaround for design edits and this tends to ease any stress.
In addition, I included a client creative process infographic letting the client know the steps of the entire sponsored content process in case they wanted to follow along because it can get to be a little complex.

This extra step in the beginning alerted everyone. It placed the responsibility on the client to reply, and it placed the responsibility on the writer and/or photographer to set up a time for interviewing and photos.

It takes the guessing out: Simplify the system and take the lead here, creative director. Initiate conversation on all ends.

7. **Create a workflow visual for Cherry Creative staff**

The second semester of 2019-2020 had new employees not familiar with the Cherry Creative workflow. Conversations and meetings work for some, but some learn in other ways — visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

Create a workflow diagram, visual or infographic to help student employees visualize and comprehend what is expected of them at every step in the process. They need to know that if an editor sends edits back to them, they can’t wait three days to make those edits because that story may need to go all the way through the editing queue again, which is three people long. Create a flow chart, wheel or circle diagram to show these steps. Don’t include too much description because the purpose is not to explain word-for-word what they’re doing but to remind them about the full picture.
8. *Create a workshop training at the start of each new school year*

To start the 2019-2020 school year, Cherry Creative held a joint summer training with the Talisman staff. Cherry Creative and Talisman have the same professional staff adviser, so it was easier for him to help organize both. It also gave Cherry Creative a chance to work with new people and a larger group. Cherry Creative is the smallest staff of the three divisions of WKU Student Publications, and the more perspectives, the better.

I met with the Cherry Creative leadership team — the photo, writing and design editors, and the video coordinator — the week before the workshop. The workshop was two days, the Saturday and Sunday before the fall semester started. On Sunday, we started with the two publications mixed, but we were separated by specialty. In these
individual sessions, the editors of Cherry Creative and Talisman covered technicalities and skills they believed would be most useful for the start of the semester.

For example, the writing teams covered things such as AP style basics, story structures, the parts of a lead and showed examples of good journalism. The photo and video teams went over lighting and how to light a portrait properly. And the design team covered basics InDesign and certain tools they might use in the program. Each day was about two hours long, and we found it helpful to the startup process.

We ended the day on Sunday by splitting. I sat in on the Cherry Creative writing meeting, and we brainstormed all together for what would have been our first publication that year, Fashion. The writers contributed potential story ideas, inspiration and showed much enthusiasm. As the fall semester went on, I heard one of my editors say, “I wish we could get the same passion that we had from that first writing meeting all together.”

The two-day workshop gave editors a chance to go more in depth on weaknesses we noticed in years past and the staffers to mingle and form a bond. We wanted a team that believed in what we were doing and were excited about what they got to create, the passion we sought.

Another all staff training session may be beneficial in the middle of the school year. In January 2020, since some of the Cherry Creative staff was new, we invited the advertising adviser to talk to the team about pitching sponsored content alongside ad reps. If implemented in the future, this could help Cherry Creative staffers better understand advertising’s in Cherry Creative.
9. Revamp the Best of the Hill Festival

The Best of the Hill publication needed to be revamped in 2020, and I believe we came up with the idea that was going to save the “Best of” publication for WKU Student Publications.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to go through with our original plans. Best of the Hill could not be printed. We did still promote the first, second and third place winners of the voting that was submitted by students, faculty, staff and Bowling Green community members.

The previous 2019 Best of the Hill publication didn’t generate a lot of revenue and had a low voter turnout. The advertising team believed something needed to change to really be able to pitch it to advertisers.

In January 2020, WKU Student Publications operations coordinator, WKU Herald, Cherry Creative and advertising leadership teams came up with a Best of the Hill Festival to host in conjunction with the Best of Hill publication. The Best of the Hill Festival was modeled on “Taste of” events that are seen in a lot of big cities. We actually couldn’t use that name because there was already a “Taste of Bowling Green.” The event was meant to be an incentive for advertisers to raise vote totals. We planned on hosting the event on March 19 from 10:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Centennial Mall, where a majority of students passed by each day. The event was a week before we said voting would officially close on March 24. In years past, we had closed voting nearly three weeks after voting opened, and the advertising team could only sell to the businesses that came in first place, pitching something like: “Hey, your business was voted first place in our Best
of the Hill voting, don’t you want to put an ad in our Best of the Hill publication to say thank you to everyone who voted for you?"

This timeframe limited the ad reps in who they could approach and left nonwinners out of the publication.

By keeping voting open during the event and nearly two weeks before the publication came out, we were able to create live updates for the ad reps, so they could see which businesses led. That way, they were able to approach the businesses even in last place. The event provided an additional incentive because we planned to have voting booths there. Ten clients signed up to be at the event before we had to cancel it.

The advertising staff reported having great success and were gaining momentum up until events had to be cancelled or postponed. In March 2020, a Cherry Creative designer created a digital image of a badge to send to all of the winners from 2020 voting. We’re hoping this small gesture fosters relationships with the businesses that do survive the COVID-19 closures.

Best of the Hill can and should be something the WKU community looks forward to and celebrates. Creating more of an event around the publication is one way Cherry Creative can revive this publication.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN STUDENT MEDIA

According to the Pew Research Center, more than nine-in-ten (93%) millennials (ages 23 to 38) own smartphones and nearly 100% say they use the Internet. Thus, the Internet should be the first priority for publications on a college campus with millennials making up most of their population. Print publications limit the creative solutions media agencies can offer to clients. With a digital presence, agencies have the freedom to reach a specific audience and track the results through various storytelling forms.

As advertising revenue continues to decline, it will be essential for newsrooms across the country to find new ways to reach advertising clients—be it through the digital advertising mediums offered or the possibilities of sponsored content. From college media outlets to international publications reaching millions of people daily, sponsored content and native advertising offer unique opportunities to engage with readers and encourage interactivity. The audience is what’s driving the content. Reuters Plus, the branded content studio for global news organization Reuters, stated in its “Content Connect II” report that 75% of the Reuters audience is more receptive to content if it is relevant to them. In a study fielded from April 10 to May 3, 2017, 63% of the Reuters audience polled agreed that personally relevant information increased how they felt about a brand and 6 in 10 of the participants preferred creative and thought-provoking content for consumption. This study revealed branded content is what the audience wants to see. It’s the implementation that becomes the next question.
The following recommendations could help student media professionals continue to explore the possibilities to come with sponsored content and branded content agencies.

I. Determining scope

The easiest way to incorporate sponsored content into student media is when a publication already creates special editions for big events or themed inserts for the newspaper or magazine. This is similar to the way it was started at agencies like the University of Washington’s Husky Media Group and WKU’s Cherry Creative. Typically, these additional publications are just more responsibility for the editorial-focused publications.

The branded content agency’s first role becomes creating these special sections, which in turn enhances the quality of the special sections and allows the other student-run operations to allot more time to other tasks.

Sponsored content in special sections becomes easier for advertising representatives to pitch because there’s added value to being in an exclusive edition. It also aids writers in knowing ahead of time what kinds of clients they’re going to be working with and topics they’re going to be covering. For example, a car mechanic is not likely going to advertise in a health and wellness guide.

If special sections are not a viable entry point for sponsored content, the branded content group should only take responsibility for online sponsored content before offering any other services as seen with Ball State University’s McKinley Avenue Agency (“the Agency”). Online sponsored content is an easy sell to clients because it is so trackable. A student media group is able to provide analytics as to how the post is
performing in real-time. Once the group discovers enough interest in online sponsored content, more options can unfold from there — print, sponsored videos, sponsored podcasts, sponsored social media, freelance branding projects and so much more.

It is imperative the group does not take on too much responsibility initially. Sponsored content is unfamiliar to the client and the media outlet. Build a reputation and a portfolio before spreading an agency too thin.

If there’s a partner newsroom, there should be a clear line in what products are produced by which, through clear disclosure, staffing and workspaces. This can be effectively done by physically separating within workspaces.

However, it can be helpful for communication to remain in the same building if at all possible. And although all of the publications may fall under one brand, like the Husky Media Group’s Office of Student Publications and Kent State Student Media, there must be a clear distinction in the branding of these outlets. For example, Kent State Student Media’s student-run newspaper, The Kent Stater, has a different logo than the student-run fashion magazine, A Magazine.

Student employees should not work for more than one of those publications to maintain credibility for the entire organization and minimize running into conflicts of interest when reporting. This is seen at California Polytechnic State University’s Mustang Media Group (MMG) and several national branded content agencies.
II. What to look for in first student leaders

The first years are critical to the success of sponsored content, but there is also an incredible amount of freedom for the students to shape the branded content agency or media group into whatever they want it to be. With that, comes a considerable amount of responsibility for a student leader. It’s essential for the student leaders to have a vision. That vision doesn’t have to be concrete and unwavering. In fact, that’s impossible in this everchanging profession. The leader should have aspirations for the organizations, so that a successor can take over with confidence. Similar to the Husky Media Group’s student leaders, these individuals must take initiative in garnering enthusiasm behind the new brand.

Both Nicole Childress, the first Cherry Creative director, and Jacob Lauing, MMG’s first branded content editor, said the students also have to be business-minded in some way. Journalism and an understanding for the many facets of media is, of course, essential, but sponsored content is fulfilling a service for a client and generating revenue. The student leaders need to understand the goal of a sponsored content group is to satisfy an advertiser and fulfill that advertiser’s need.

The student leaders of the advertising team and branded content agency should also work well together and communicate often. A strong relationship between these two positions reflects positively on the new branded content agency.

Finally, these student leaders cannot be afraid of change. Sponsored content is unfamiliar territory in a lot of newsrooms and there are a lot of risks that come with it.
But if done the right way, sponsored content can be effective and make a lot of money as other companies and schools have proven.

There are also a lot of critics to sponsored content. And these student leaders need to be prepared to stand up for what they believe and willing to fight for what they think is right for the organization.

III. Creating a mission statement

A mission statement is essential when creating any new brand. It can introduce the idea of sponsored content to more people and reinforce your role in business to clients, which is similar to what MMG and the McKinley Avenue Agency have done. Sponsored content and the creation process is hard to understand, so anything else that can be provided to the client to paint a clearer picture of who the media entity is helps. Many advertisers who take advantage of sponsored content are also previous advertisers in other publications, so they may be confused as to where the new media group fits into all of this like at the Husky Media Group where most of the UW population only knows about the student newspaper. A mission statement can help differentiate the brand and gives the new name some added credibility.

Think back to why you chose this form of storytelling when you create the mission statement. What is the approach to this type of storytelling, and how do you intend to disclose your information?

Your mission statement should outline what your sponsored content will accomplish for the advertising client, the audience and for your organization. Put simply, your
mission statement should be a set of bullet points for those three audiences and address the ethical considerations.

IV. Approaching the first clients

Making the “sell” to clients early on in the process must be strategic and well thought out. The clients your media group or branded content agency chooses to approach should be advertisers/clients your organization has worked with in the past. These could be advertisers who are heavily invested in the student publications department financially or who are frequent advertisers with small advertising contributions, which is similar to what was done to get sponsored content started at the Agency.

The first clients are people you have a strong relationship with and have built mutual trust like the first partnership created at MMG with campus dining and the bookstore.

It could be beneficial to offer sponsored content as an added benefit to advertisers signing onto new contracts in other publications or as a “thank you” for being a loyal advertiser. The hope is to build content to show to new advertisers who may not have as much trust in a newly formed content agency, which Lauing said was the sole goal in MMG’s first year.

It’s important to stress that the advertiser is involved in the entire process, which is one of the biggest advantages of sponsored content. The McKinley Avenue Agency said businesses in the Muncie, Indiana-area often wonder how they can get coverage in the newspaper, not knowing that those decisions are left entirely up to the editorial teams.
and should be out of the advertising team’s control. But it becomes a great entry point for the McKinley Avenue Agency to sell sponsored content.

Approach clients with an online option in mind. Print publications often aren’t the advertiser’s first choice platform. Using online sponsored content as a backup option for them is strong because they also receive analytics and data that can help their business beyond just the exposure the post guarantees, which is one of the greatest advantages MMG stresses to its clients.

Analytics are a great selling point for sponsored content and way to maintain client relationships by revealing the success of a project, which is something MMG and the McKinley Avenue Agency both do. Branded content agencies like T Brand Studio and the Atlantic’s Re:think studio do a great job at providing clients with a project overview explaining the project’s successes, performance insights and future considerations.

Finally, approach the first clients with transparency. Let them know this is a newly founded media group and branded content agency just trying to get content published. Businesses had to start somewhere and are empathetic to human stories and often willing to help a cause they can relate to.

V. Setting rates

When it comes to setting rates, there is not a standard rate that applies to all branded content agencies. A lot of it depends on your location and/or the advertising rates you may already have in place for display or digital ads. A good starting point is looking at media kits or rates of branded content agencies you would like to use as a model for
your media group. Look at their prices and compare those with the advertising rates you may already have in place. Rates will increase with experience and increased demand, as the Agency, Kent State Student Media and Husky Media Group have all shown. New branded content agencies may have to start by charging less than what they would like to get the operation up and running and gradually increase sponsored content rates as more advertisers buy-in to the service.

Call the advisers and student leaders of media groups at nearby universities to create a benchmark from similar sized universities.

Consider how much you can afford to pay your student workers and then consider all of the other expenses associated with the production of one sponsored content post. Take a look at how much your agency already charges for a full-page ad, color or black and white, and base rates off that. Find a comfortable number with the associated expenses that would leave you with a profit that justifies printing and/or production.

And remember it is OK if these numbers change throughout the year. The first year is a trial run. Your clients will be a good test to whether your prices are too high or too low.

VI. Staff structure

Keep the staff minimal during the first year and expand thereafter.

It is essential to have an editor-in-chief or creative director type position who handles all of the managerial tasks, including hiring and firing, leading trainings and
workshops, holding meetings, paying the staff, etc. Kent State Student Media calls this position the marketing manager.

A middle tier leadership team for editing and proofreading can be helpful so it’s not all the creative director’s responsibility as is the case with the Husky Media Group. This middle tier can be as simple as a multimedia and writing editor just so there is a go-to person for the general staff before the student leader.

Project managers or account managers who process orders, serve as liaisons to client communication and create project briefs are also essential to a branded content team, which is similar to the account manager position the McKinley Avenue Agency and project manager position at T Brand Studio. This position would fall beneath the director position in a typical organizational structure but would certainly qualify as a leadership role.

For the first year of the branded content studio, a lot of general staffers may not be necessary. Your organization may be able to outsource all branded content to freelance writers similar to Kent State Student Media and Husky Media Group.

Depending on the size of the media group and the student publications organization, an entire design staff may not be necessary but a design editor responsible for laying out the specialty publications and/or online sponsored content is necessary, which Husky Media Group discovered in its first year after trial and error. This person will likely work closely with the creative director, who should be able to help the design editor, if needed.
Potential positions media groups or branded content agencies may consider incorporating after the first year are more general staff members, a social media manager and a video editor to begin offering video services.

VII. **Bylines and model release forms**

Refrain from using bylines to protect the credibility of your content creators and photographers, especially if students are able to work on multiple staffs. Removing bylines also increases the credibility of the entire student media department by implying that all information is coming from the paying client. Some schools have opted to use a more generic byline like the Agency’s “Ball State Daily Advertising” byline or the Atlantic’s “The Renewal Project” byline.

Model release forms are an essential form of protection for this line of work too. These forms protect the department, the agency and the student from libel lawsuits and claims of defamation. When creating these model release forms, don’t reinvent the wheel. Again, contact benchmark schools or research what your university’s marketing department has in place for inspiration.

These are standard legal documents that can easily be customized for your media group or branded content agency and housed on your personal website for both clients and staffers to access.
VIII. Creative process

Unfortunately, there is also not an end-all-be-all creative process for branded content agencies to follow. However, it is important for all levels of the staff to be aware of whatever workflow is implemented and to know where they fit in the process.

Full staff brainstorming meetings can be helpful in creating stories to pitch to clients. These meetings can stem from an upcoming special section being published in the student newspaper or be more general with ideas for all platforms, similar to what is done for special sections at MMG and overall sponsored content at Kent State Student Media.

It is often helpful to have reoccurring full staff meetings with the advertising and/or marketing team included. Kent State Student Media has these meetings weekly to plan upcoming special sections and events.

A project management system should be used to log sponsored content assignments and to track those in progress, being pitched or sold. This can be as simple as an Excel document shared with the staff or something more complex like PMP, the software used by the Agency. This keeps everyone up to date and informed throughout the process.

After brainstorming ideas, ad reps should pitch the story ideas to advertisers. Creating mock-ups or “specs” can be helpful in selling these ideas, which is similar to the system in place at Kent State Student Media where all sponsored content is created in advance. Because not all schools or programs will have the capacity to create mock-ups for every project, try to have a creative team member attend the sales pitch to elaborate on the idea.
When communicating with the client, it may be beneficial to provide the client with some kind of explanation of the creative process, which is similar to the “How it works” infographic featured on the MMG website.

Opportunity or creative briefs are helpful in summarizing client discussions if a creative team member is not present at the pitch meeting. These briefs include insights like client objectives, key messages, target audiences and creative and branding strategies and could be created by a project manager role, which is similar to the Agency, T Brand Studio and Re:think. These briefs give the creative team a clear idea of what the client wants to accomplish and leaves little room for a misunderstanding of expectations.

Once sponsored content is sold, written work and visuals should flow through an editing queue so that it is proofed multiple times before publishing. Ideally, the content is also being edited before it reaches the creative director too.

For writing specifically, the editor is fact checking, making spelling and grammar corrections, AP style line editing and suggesting any edits to the overall content. By the time the content arrives at the creative director’s desk, most of the edits have hopefully been identified, but now the creative director is able to make any suggestions based on the editor’s remarks and then some of their own. Ideally, a professional staff adviser would take a final look at the document before letting the writer make necessary changes.

The client must also have some type of review in this process too. Email has proved to be the best way to do that by asking them to send any edits back. Though some schools have allowed clients to make edits directly, the branded content agency should make all necessary edits.
For photo editing, if a photo editor is on staff, they should be the ones selecting and editing photos. The McKinley Avenue Agency has one person who handles all photography and videography fulfilling the editor and staff photographer role, which may be a good option for schools with a smaller workforce.

The design workflow depends on the media platform to which sponsored content is published. If it’s a print publication, at least one final design proof should be sent to the client before publishing as design edits may differ from content edits. The design editor is responsible for making sure these changes are made before being printed or posted online.

Online sponsored content should be edited just as any other sponsored content. Uploading the content to the site should be a responsibility of the design editor with possible review from the creative director before publishing to the site.

Follow-up surveys and analytics reports should be the final step in the workflow process, similar to the Husky Media Group and Re:think studio’s procedures.

Follow-up surveys can be helpful in gathering feedback from clients to see what can be improved about the agency, creative process and/or communication. A good example of this is the Husky Media Group. The advertising manager notifies clients how successful pick-up rates were for special sections and asks clients about their experience working with Husky Media Group to improve the overall sponsored content process.

Typically, a few weeks to a month is an adequate amount of time to wait before sending to the client.
IX. Maintaining client relationships

Client relationships are crucial to the success of a branded content agency. The client is the number one priority. It is important to deliver print publications to clients to ensure they receive the product if the student newspaper or magazine is not already distributed there, which is something Husky Media Group has implemented as of 2019. If hand delivering is not possible, the media group should mail a publication to the client.

Follow-up surveys and questionnaires, like those introduced by Husky Media Group and Re:think, as stated previously, are essential to the creative process and nurturing client relationships.

Another effort that can help maintain client relationships is sharing sponsored content posts on social media. If the branded content agency does not have an account, encourage the student workers to share their work and tag their businesses. Getting the conversation started on social media and sharing it so all of your friends and followers see it is just added exposure for your clients, which they can’t be upset about.

X. Staff training

Training new employees is something every organization has to face. Sponsored content is new to everyone, not just student staff. Implementing an effective all staff training is critical to the success of your agency.

Requiring positions with more responsibility to work over the summer is one option Husky Media Group has adopted, which ensures the new staff will have experience and time to get past the learning curve of a new job. Since some schools may
not have the resources to pay students throughout the summer, hosting a mandatory summer workshop before the fall semester begins may be a better option.

A less optimal option would be implementing something similar to the McKinley Avenue Agency or MMG, which is an “associate” or intern program. In this training program, students are unpaid but learning on-the-job to combat the struggle of finding time to train students and still having time to get the work done. The intern training program is a mandatory step in reaching a paid position or leadership role. It allows media agencies to be more selective in hiring to ensure applicants have taken helpful and necessary classes, which is important when dealing with paying clients.

Workshops and sessions led by professionals working in the field are another good way to offer more learning opportunities throughout the year addressing topics student staff may be struggling with.

**XI. Role of an adviser**

The adviser of a branded content agency is there for support and guidance. This role is sensitive in any newly formed branded content agency because there is a lot of freedom and room to grow. That means those student leaders will have outside influences and pressures to deal with as they make important decisions. It’s important for advisers to recognize that and to try to remain as impartial as possible. By asserting opinions or thoughts, they are greatly affecting the makeup of the media group.

The adviser is nudging students forward but never leading, which is evident in the Husky Media Group’s director and the Agency’s professional adviser. The adviser is making sure students are given the necessary tools to problem solve, perhaps fail, but
pick themselves up and try again. These are young professionals and students who may have never had a true job before. It is important for the adviser to be present when dealing with paying clients and revenue goals on the line. However, it’s also important that the adviser is merely spurring conversation instead of directing it.

The purpose of student media is to provide students with experiences that will prepare them for life after college. The role of the advisers is perhaps the most important one because their support is the backbone of any organization. For a media group or a branded content studio to be successful, the adviser has to believe in the students and believe in the mission of student media even more.
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Sponsored Content: What to expect

Publication: Herald (Print)

For most sponsored content, you’ll be in contact with three people from WKU Student Publications.

Your ad consultant will handle the business side of sponsored content. He or she will be able to answer questions about pricing, billing, contracts, payments and more.

The writer and the photographer have the expertise to tell your story in the most compelling way possible. If you’re not sure what story you want told, they’ll brainstorm story angles with you. The writer will arrange for interviews with you and/or anyone else relevant to the story angle you agree upon. The photographer will identify the best visuals to accompany your story and make arrangements to take those photographs. All effort will be made for the writer and photographer to have an initial meeting with you at the same time. Occasionally however, schedules may not allow that and the writer and photographer will need to meet with you individually.

The writer will share a draft of the story for your input before publication. If more than one person from your organization is being interviewed, let the writer know the primary contact person who will have the authority to give final approval and edits. That’s the person we’ll send the draft and proof to.

The final PDF for proofing, which will have the story and photos laid out on the page as they will be published, will be emailed by Hayley Robb, the creative director, and will be sent from the email address cherrycreativewku@gmail.com. A PDF will not be sent for online sponsored content, but we will send multiple drafts if necessary to make sure we have your story right. Feel free to contact Hayley with any other questions about the sponsored content process as well.

Take note of the contact information for each of these people.

Ad Consultant ___________________________________________

Writer ___________________________________________

Photographer ___________________________________________

COMMITMENT DEADLINE
13 business days before publication
A writer and/or photographer will be in contact with you shortly after you sign an insertion order committing to a sponsored content piece.

REVIEW DEADLINE
4 p.m. Tuesday before publication
The writer will send a draft of the story for your input by 9 a.m. on the Tuesday before publication.

PROOFING DEADLINE
4 p.m. Friday before publication
You will be emailed a PDF showing how the story will be laid out, including the story, photos, captions and headline, by 9 a.m. on the Friday before publication.

Failure to provide feedback and approval by these deadlines may result in missing the press deadline. If the sponsored content piece is not published because of a client’s failure to communicate by deadline, the client will remain responsible for the full price of the sponsored content and will have an option to run the piece at a later date for an additional charge.

If you are creating your own sponsored content, the story and photos must be received by 4 p.m. Tuesday the week before the content is scheduled for publication. The story and high-resolution photos should be sent to your ad consultant. You will receive a PDF design proof by 9 a.m. Friday before publication and must reply with changes by 4 p.m. that Friday.
Sponsored content creative process

1. A writer and/or photographer from the Cherry Creative team will get in touch with you via phone or email regarding your sponsored content request.

2. The creative team member will work with you to schedule a time for an interview. In-person meetings are preferred because this method generates more natural storytelling and makes follow-up questions much easier via email or phone.

3. You will receive a written draft of the sponsored content piece from the writer with at least two business days to review the content. Depending on the edits, we can go back and forth making edits until you are happy with the content.

4. You will receive a design proof from Cherry Creative director Hayley Robb (cherrycreativewku@gmail.com). This will be a preview of the page laid out for the publication. You will be required to send any edits to the proof to us within that same day.*

5. If a digital piece is purchased, we use the College Heights Herald and/or Talisman’s website analytics to track the activity of your sponsored content piece. We will send you a report after the first published month.

*The quick turnaround in step 4 ensures our creative team is able to meet printer deadlines. If a client fails to communicate by deadline, the client will remain responsible for the full price of the sponsored content and will have an option to run the piece at a later date for an additional charge.
APPENDIX C


Exhibit offers unique lenses on Kentucky heritage

BY RYAN GOODLETT
Cherry Creative

A turquoise, heavily-pleated and ornately-detailed vintage wedding gown worn in 1906 hangs elegantly from a mannequin on display in the Kentucky Museum’s newest exhibit, “Out of the Box.”

The new exhibit, “Out of the Box,” has been curated by 11 WKU faculty members from nine different programs. Tiffany Isselhardt, the development and marketing manager at the museum, said that her job as a curator is to guide people on how to tell stories about artifacts.

“Out of the Box” highlights five core aspects of Bowling Green culture and some of the biggest collections represented at the museum — caving, medicine, religion, music and local business.

The exhibit offers a unique take on Kentucky heritage by providing a glance through many different professional lenses. Faculty from multiple programs offer their expertise on each cultural aspect through writing text for each artifact.

“Just because it’s something from one field doesn’t mean it’s just that field,” Isselhardt said. “Art can tell us about history and culture. Religion and music can tell us about people’s daily lives and not just their beliefs, but how they relate to one another.”

WKU professors Whitney Peake, Carrie Cox and Kate Hudepohl tell the story of Carrie Burnham Taylor, a Bowling Green native and renowned tailor of high-end dresses during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The 1906 wedding gown on display is one of Taylor’s dresses, and the trio of professors researched her Victorian-age style and business strategy from the perspectives of business and entrepreneurship, fashion merchandising and anthropology.

Cox, a fashion merchandising professor, recalled participating in collaborative projects with the Kentucky Museum when she was a student studying fashion at WKU in the 1980s. At the time, her undergraduate professor was doing research on the same Taylor. Cox has been thrilled to give her students the same opportunity and to delve deeper into the life of Taylor so many years later.

“Carrie Taylor is no longer designing,” Cox said. “What would she be doing if she was alive right now?”

Art history professor Guy Jordan was also involved in curating the interdisciplinary collaboration, Out of the Box.

“I’ve been here 13 years but what’s remarkable about the Kentucky Museum is I’m always discovering new objects that are interesting and fun and that can tell us a lot about the past and different fields of knowledge — not just art, but also science and history,” Jordan said.

Jordan explained that for the exhibit, one of the labels he wrote was for a painting of a historic African-American church on Russellville Road he didn’t know was there. For him, “Out of the Box” has been an opportunity to learn about different cultural presences in Kentucky and affirm the study of objects as invaluable primary sources.

“What I like about this show is that you’ve got folks from different fields,” Jordan said. “What a history professor, a religion professor and an art history professor might have to say about something can be very different.”

The “Out of the Box” exhibit will be on display at the Kentucky Museum through June 30, 2020.
APPENDIX D

Figure 1

2019-2020 WKU Student Publications media kit
Student Publications

Student Publications is home to the College Heights Herald, Talisman and Cherry Creative.

The Herald, which was founded in 1925, is among the most honored student-run news organizations in the country. Holding 17 national Pacemaker Awards, the highest honor in collegiate journalism, the Herald publishes each Tuesday during the academic year and updates WKUHerald.com daily.

The Talisman is a high-end, semi-annual magazine and ever-changing website covering the life and culture of WKU and Bowling Green. Talisman is proud to boast 20 Pacemaker Awards.

Cherry Creative is a group of skilled storytellers who help clients reach the WKU community through sponsored content and specialty publications.

Student Publications provides students with experiences and career opportunities. We provide our audiences with news, information and an accurate representation of life.

Contact us

Will Hoogland
Advertising Adviser
270-745-6285
william.hoogland@WKU.edu

Sam Oldenburg
Cherry Creative Adviser
270-745-3055
samuel.oldenburg@WKU.edu

Chuck Clark
Student Publications Director
270-745-4206
chuck.clark@WKU.edu

Brian Kehne
Advertising Manager
270-745-6284
herald.advertising@WKU.edu

Hayley Robb
Cherry Creative Director
270-745-6287
cherrycreative@WKU.com

Emma Spainhoward
Art Director
270-745-6287
herald.create@WKU.edu

Billing Office
1906 College Heights Blvd. #11084
Bowling Green, KY 42101
270-745-2653

General Advertising Questions
herald.advertising@WKU.edu
Figure 3

Print advertising
The College Heights Herald is the No. 1 source of campus news and the best way to reach the WKU market. The print edition is published every Tuesday to the WKU community and handed directly to students by our distribution team. We can get your message out! For information on sponsored content, see page 8.

Standard advertisements
Sizes & Pricing
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>BL</th>
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<td>Sixteenth Horizontal</td>
<td>$87.98</td>
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</table>

Deadlines
- Prepaid: Sales - Tuesday, 4 p.m.
- Billed Campus: Artwork - Wednesday, 4 p.m.
- Billed Local: 

Color + $150.00

Premium advertisements
Advertise on our front page or other main section fronts. This premium placement is an eighth-page, full-color, horizontal for section fronts and the photo page, or eighth vertical or horizontal black and white for the fun page. Premium placement can also be requested on A2 or A3 at a 5% premium or on the back page of any section at a 10% premium.
Inserts

The College Heights Herald must receive at least one copy of the insert for review of acceptability before shipment. The maximum insert size is 12 inches by 10 inches; anything larger must be folded. Die-cut inserts must have at least one straight edge. Inserts should be shipped to the address below one week before insertion. The Herald is not responsible for loss or cost of returning inserts shipped prior to notice.

The Henderson Gleaner
455 Klutey Park Plaza
Henderson, KY 42420

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate per thousand</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi fold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 plus pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maximum insert amount: 5,000

Online advertising

WKUHerald.com is the place to get seen by WKU students, faculty, staff and alumni. Averaging more than 150,000 page views per month, the website is the perfect way to connect to the campus community and beyond. The go-to source for need-to-know information, WkuHerald.com provides breaking news, in-depth features and other unique content to an ideal audience for your business.

Marketplace

Showcase your social media posts throughout our website on a customized widget placed in a highly visible area for all of our users to see.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly annual rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$200</td>
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</table>

Website advertisements

Rates are per month; consult your advertising rep for discounts on longer commitments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Run of site</th>
<th>Home</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top leaderboard</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Side rail</td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>$600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom leaderboard</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$400</td>
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Contract packages

Contract packages allow you to receive a discounted rate for all of our Herald products when you commit to advertising throughout the academic year. All contracts can include print, online, sponsored content, special sections, kiosks and social media. View of the Hill, Dining Guide, Big Red Coupon Book, Tolisman and special events are excluded from the packages.

Package 1
$500 - 5% discount
Package 2
$1,000 - 10% discount
Package 3
$2,000 - 15% discount
Package 4
$3,000 - 20% discount
Package 5
$4,000 - 25% discount
Package 6
$8,000 - 25% discount and no additional charges for position or color

Kiosk advertisements

Fifteen highly visible kiosks throughout campus are passed by thousands of students, faculty, staff and visitors each day and serve as distribution points for Herald ambassadors as they personally hand out the paper every week. The outdoor kiosks are the only outdoor advertising on campus outside of athletic facilities.

Ads can be printed and provided by the client or printed by the Herald. All outdoor ads must be laminated against weather.

Print & Lamination: $100 each
Lamination Only: $25 each
Print Only (Indoor): $75 each

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<tr>
<td>One side on one kiosk</td>
<td>$200</td>
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<tr>
<td>One side on three kiosks</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$1,250</td>
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**Dimensions**
Outdoor: 23”w x 36”h
Indoor: 24”w x 48”h

Outdoor kiosks
1. Gary Ransdell Hall, at transit stop
2. Guthrie Tower, along central walkway on north edge
3. Downing Student Union, east entrance facing Minton Hall
4. Centennial Mall, endcap closest to Downing Student Union
5. Parking Structure 1, near elevators on the main entrance
6. Colonnade Drive, between Wetherby Administration Building and Terry Colonnade
7. Old Fort, across from central clock
8. The Valley, between Hilltopper Hall and neighboring dorms
9. WKU Transit stop, across the street from Henry Hardin Cherry Hall
10. WKU Transit stop, near Environmental Sciences and Technology Hall

Indoor kiosks
1. Jody Richards Hall, first floor near computer lab
2. Grise Hall, first floor inside front entrance
3. Fine Arts Center, first floor near elevator
4. Garrett Food Court, bottom level entrance
5. Snell Hall, first floor entryway near Deli/
Figure 6

Newsletters
More than 1,200 subscribers receive a twice-weekly email newsletter recapping and condensing the Herald's top stories.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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Sponsored social media posts
Have the Herald share your promos on Twitter or Facebook and grow your audience at $50 per post, or less if bundled.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 posts</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$135 - $45/each</td>
<td>$200 - $40/each</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 posts</td>
<td>20 posts</td>
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<tr>
<td>$350 - $35/each</td>
<td>$600 - $30/each</td>
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Topper Extra
Get in on all the action with Topper Extra, our in-depth online coverage published ahead of each WKU football and basketball game. Your business can be the sole sponsor highlighted on the Topper Extra section of the website with a package that includes sponsored tweets and exclusive Marketplace access. Contact your ad consultant for rates and additional details.

Herald Business Directory
A premium listing presents your information with a customized profile page on the Herald's website. Upload your own content — including videos, photos, coupons, menus, and more. You’ll get in front of our broad audience while also building your search engine optimization for Bowling Green and WKU’s campus via our website. A premium listing can only be purchased in conjunction with other digital or print advertising.

Add-on only: $20/month

WKU Apartments.com
The premier local search for WKU students looking for housing close to campus, WKU Apartments.com allows property managers and apartments to share their property listings. The user-friendly site allows potential renters to search by rooms, price or amenities as they seek out housing near campus.

Complexes, property managers
- Monthly: $100/month
- Quarterly: $75/month
- Annually: $50/month

Single unit
- House, duplex or sublease: $30 - One month online and one print classified
Figure 8

TALISMAN

The Talisman magazine is a high-end semi-annual magazine that is dedicated to high-quality journalism, stunning photography and fun, quirky content that is relevant to the WKU community. As a premium magazine, many readers keep each issue for several months or longer. A website companion to the magazine, WKUTalisman.com has a voice of its own. The site’s news, culture and lifestyle content is presented in an eclectic, intelligent style.

Newsletter

More than 1,100 subscribers receive a weekly email newsletter sharing a mix of stories from the week. Ad size is 728px wide by 90 px high.

One week

$45

One month

$150

Semester rate

$500

Magazine advertisements

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<td>March 25</td>
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Online advertising

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<td>In-Post</td>
<td>360px wide, 250px high</td>
<td>$12/day, $120/week</td>
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The Cherry Creative staff produces sponsored content pieces that are published in print or online through the Herald, Talisman or other specialty publications put out by WKU Student Publications. A Cherry Creative writer, photographer or designer will work with you to create a piece on a topic agreed upon by your business.

**Special sections**

Each special section offers a specific theme that may be a perfect fit for your business. All special sections are printed in full color.

**Sizes & Prices**

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<tr>
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<td>March 2</td>
<td>March 30</td>
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<td>Feb. 25</td>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>April 7</td>
<td>May 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Best of the Hill rates include the opportunity to have a table at our on-campus Best of the Hill event March 19.
Sponsored content

Let us tell your story. WKU Student Publications has unparalleled reach into the WKU community, and we are the best avenue to get your story out. Sponsored content pieces will be similar in style to the editorial content in the publication but will be labeled as being sponsored by your business. The piece can be provided by your business or produced by our creative staff. If our staff is producing the piece, you will be able to be involved throughout the process and proof the piece before publication.

The standard rates for sponsored content are listed below. However, the sky is the limit when it comes to what the Cherry Creative staff can create for your business. Intensive, in-depth pieces, including video, will be priced on a case-by-case basis.

College Heights Herald
Print - $500 black and white, $650 color
Half page, approximately 500 words and one photograph.
Online - $350
Approximately 500 words and 1-3 photographs, stays online for three months and shared once on social media.

Talisman
Print - $1,500
Two page spread, approximately 400-600 words and 1-3 photos
Online - $350
Approximately 500 words and 1-3 photographs or illustrations, stays online for three months and shared once on social media.

View of the Hill
Print - $1,000
One page, approximately 400-600 words and 1-2 photographs

Special Sections
Print - $500
Full page, tabloid size, approximately 400-600 words and 1-2 photographs.
View of the Hill

Published each summer, View of the Hill is mailed to the homes of all incoming WKU freshmen and distributed during welcome back events at the beginning of the fall semester. The magazine highlights what a new student can expect at WKU, including clubs and organizations, university traditions and the local businesses Bowling Green offers. Distribution begins mid-summer. Check with your ad consultant for this year’s deadlines and design specifications.

Sizes & Prices

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
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<td>$60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dining Guide

Our “A Table for Y’all” dining guide is the comprehensive source for restaurant options in Bowling Green. All establishments serving food in Warren County are listed in the directory, but you’ll want to invest in an advertisement to stand out among the hundreds of options. Produced in partnership with the Bowling Green Convention & Visitors Bureau, the guide is distributed on campus and at brochure racks in hotels and other points frequented by visitors throughout the community. Check with your ad consultant for this year’s rates, deadlines and design specifications.

Big Red Coupon Book

Introduce students to your business by pulling them in with a coupon in the Big Red Coupon Book. As students descend on Bowling Green for the start of the school year, you’ll get in front of both new and returning Hilltoppers. This publication is distributed during the first few weeks of the fall semester. Check with your ad consultant for this year’s rates, deadlines and design specifications.

WKU Housing Fair

Our one-day housing fair Feb. 25 will provide students with a one-stop shop as they make housing decisions for the upcoming school year. Apartment complexes, property managers and service providers won’t want to miss this opportunity to connect with students focused on their housing needs. The fair will be held in Downing Student Union, with a variety of space and table options. Talk with your ad consultant to find out about packages, rates and other details.
Advertising policies

- WKU Student Publications reserves the right to refuse an advertisement if it deems objectionable for any reason.
- No paid advertisement is accompanied by additional free notices or news stories.
- Advertising having the appearance of news must be clearly labeled as "Paid Advertising" or "Sponsored Content." The Herald or Talisman will determine if the labeling meets standards for clarity.
- Student Publications will not publish advertising that encourages irresponsible drinking and/or the illegal use of alcoholic beverages.
- All political, "closing" and "going out of business" advertising must be prepaid.
- Advertising statements and tearsheets must be submitted for collection and will be charged the amount of the ad's space.
- Accounts not paid after 90 days will be considered a full page and will be billed accordingly.
- Accounts not paid within 60 days may be offered credit at a rate of 30%.
- Ad changes and cancellations must be made before the advertising deadline. Ads canceled after the deadline will be charged the amount of the ad's space.
- All rates are non-commissionable, net rates.
- Promotions not listed in the rate card may be offered.
- All advertising having the appearance of news must be clearly labeled as "Paid Advertising" or "Sponsored Content." The Herald or Talisman will determine if the labeling meets standards for clarity.
- It is the responsibility of the advertiser to notify Student Publications of errors within five business days. 
  - Student Publications will be responsible for errors the first time a Herald-created ad is published.
  - All political, "closing" and "going out of business" advertising must be prepaid.
  - Advertising statements and tearsheets must be submitted for collection and will be charged the amount of the ad's space.
- All political, "closing" and "going out of business" advertising must be prepaid.
- All rates are non-commissionable, net rates.
- Promotions not listed in the rate card may be offered.
- All advertising having the appearance of news must be clearly labeled as "Paid Advertising" or "Sponsored Content." The Herald or Talisman will determine if the labeling meets standards for clarity.
- In consideration of the acceptance of such advertisements for publication, the agency or advertiser assumes liability for any claim based upon the content or subject matter of such advertisements, including, without limitation, claims or suits for libel, violations of rights of privacy, plagiarism and copyright infringement.
- All advertising having the appearance of news must be clearly labeled as "Paid Advertising" or "Sponsored Content." The Herald or Talisman will determine if the labeling meets standards for clarity.
- The Herald will not post sponsored tweets that encourage irresponsible drinking and/or the illegal use of alcoholic beverages. (The Herald will not run "All-You-Can-Drink" advertisements.)
- The Herald will not post sponsored tweets that encourage irresponsible drinking and/or the illegal use of alcoholic beverages. (The Herald will not run "All-You-Can-Drink" advertisements.)

Sponsored posts policy

- The College Heights Herald will send out no more than three tweets per day.
- The client must fill out an insertion order with the list of dates and times they would like their message to be tweeted.
- This information must be submitted to the Herald two full business days in advance.
- The Herald will not post sponsored tweets that encourage irresponsible drinking and/or the illegal use of alcoholic beverages. (The Herald will not run "All-You-Can-Drink" advertisements.)

Design Checklist

Preferred Formats:
- Packaged Adobe InDesign
- Adobe Illustrator (.ai)
- Adobe EPS (.eps)
- Adobe EPS (.eps)
- InDesign
- Adobe Illustrator (.ai)
- Adobe EPS (.eps)
- Adobe EPS (.eps)
- InDesign
- Adobe Illustrator (.ai)
- Adobe EPS (.eps)

Rejected Formats:
- Microsoft Word
- Publisher
- PowerPoint
- Excel
- Pages
- GIFs
- Quark Express

Settings:
- Correct dimensions of desired advertisement
- CMYK color mode
- 300 DPI resolution
- All fonts outlined
- All images embedded

*Size and setting must be correct for publication. We are not able to adjust settings from these formats.

Deadline

For College Heights Herald publication, artwork must be sent to the art director at herald.creative@wku.edu by 4 p.m. on Wednesdays. For other publications, see deadline charts for specific dates. Artwork sent after deadline is at risk for not running, and the client will still be charged.

No designer? No problem. Our design staff can create your ad for no additional charge.
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<th>September 2019</th>
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<td>8 9 10 11 12 13 14</td>
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<td>Special publications</td>
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<td>18 19 20 21 22 23 24</td>
<td>22 23 24 25 26 27 28</td>
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<td>Fashion: Oct. 3</td>
<td>25 26 27 28 29 30 31</td>
<td>29 30</td>
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<td>November 2019</td>
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<td>October 2019</td>
<td>S M T W T F S</td>
<td>S M T W T F S</td>
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<td>10 11 12 13 14 15 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall Graduation: Dec. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2019</td>
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<td>24 25 26 27 28 29 30</td>
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<td>Talisman: Dec. 4</td>
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<td>January 2020</td>
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<td>Fit: March 17</td>
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<td>View of the Hill: June 25</td>
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<td>17 18 19 20 21 22 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2019</td>
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<td>24 25 26 27 28 29 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talisman Fashion Festival: Oct. 3</td>
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<td>March 2020</td>
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<td>March 2020</td>
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<td>MLK Day: Jan. 20</td>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>8 9 10 11 12 13 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2020</td>
<td>April 2020</td>
<td>S M T W T F S</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classes begin: Jan. 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>WKU Housing Fair: Feb. 25</td>
<td>8 9 10 11 12 13 14</td>
<td>10 11 12 13 14 15 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring break: March 9-13</td>
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<td>17 18 19 20 21 22 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best of the Hill event: March 19</td>
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<td>20 21 22 23 24 25 26</td>
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<tr>
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<td>28 29 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commencement: May 15-16</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28 29 30</td>
<td>26 27 28 29 30 31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX E**

Figure 1

*Talisman 2019 Fashion Festival package flyer*

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**WKU Fashion Festival**

*Presented by TALISMAN*

**Package A $1,500**  
MORE THAN $4,000 IN VALUE!

- 10' x 10' tent at the fashion festival
- Two-page sponsored content fashion spread in fashion guide
- High-resolution digital files of published photos for your future use
- Full-page ad in Talisman issue seven
- Four weeks of online ads on WKUTalism.com
- Six months of Marketplace advertising on WKUHerald.com
- Three sponsored tweets sent from @WKUHerald
- Up to 15 minute time slot on fashion stage
- Logo on posters and ads displayed across campus before the fashion festival
- Two reserved parking spots

**Package B $1,000**

- 10' x 10' tent at the fashion festival
- Two-page sponsored content fashion spread in fashion guide
- Half-page ad in Talisman issue seven
- Two weeks of online ads on WKUTalism.com
- Three months of Marketplace advertising on WKUHerald.com
- Up to 10 minute time slot on fashion stage
- One reserved parking spot

**Package C $600**

- One table underneath a shared tent at the fashion festival
- Half-page display ad in fashion guide (7.625" W x 4.875" H)
- One month of Marketplace advertising on WKUHerald.com
- Up to 5 minute time slot on fashion stage
- One reserved parking spot

---

*Pop-up shops  
Fashion show  
Fashion guide*

Oct. 3, 2019  
11 a.m. - 3 p.m.  
WKU South Lawn
Figure 2

*Display advertising options for the 2019 Talisman Fashion Festival.*

**Fashion Guide 2019**

Produced in conjunction with the first Talisman Fashion Festival, the fashion guide will showcase area boutiques through high-quality fashion photography, alongside fashion tips and advice.

Quantity: 3,000  
Distribution: On campus beginning at the Talisman Fashion Festival Oct. 3.  
Quality: Full color, quality paper, saddle-stitch binding, 8.125" by 10.875"

**Display Ads**

Create your own ad, or have our designers create it for no additional charge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Full Page</strong></th>
<th><strong>Half Page</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.125&quot; w x 10.875&quot; h &lt;br&gt; w/ bleed: 8.375&quot; w x 11.125&quot; h</td>
<td>7.625&quot; w x 4.875&quot; h &lt;br&gt; no bleed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ad Deadline**  
**Sept. 6**

**Artwork Due**  
**Sept. 16**

For more information, or to reserve your space, contact:

**Will Hoagland  Advertising Adviser**  270-745-6285  |  william.hoagland@wku.edu

**Avari Stamps  Advertising Manager**  270-745-6284  |  herald.advertising@wku.edu
Outfit themes offered to boutiques participating in the 2019 Talisman Fashion Festival

- WKU game day attire
- Date night
- Ballin’ on a college budget (What to wear on a budget)
- How to be Greek (The perfect themed-party outfit)
- Athleisure (What to wear at the gym or what to wear to climb “the Hill”)
- The grocery store look (Everyday attire)
- The first day of fall (What to wear on a fall weekend)
- How to: layer (Layering clothing for fall)
- Accessorize always (Best of accessories)
- The adventurer (Camping, fishing, outdoorsy)
- The hipster, coffee shop regular (Vintage)
- Throwback Thursday (Clothes inspired by past decades)
Flow chart mock-up created by Hayley Gatlin for Bowling Green local bar
Housing video add-on sales flyer for 2020 Housing Fair.

Showcase the unique features of your apartment complex through a special video add-on with this year’s Housing Fair. A visual look into potential housing can give students a glimpse of what to expect if they rent from YOU!

Now for the creative side! Similar to that of HGTV’s hit-series “House Hunters,” we plan on providing viewers with a tour of the complex as a prospective “apartment hunter.” The two to three minute video will provide footage that answers frequently asked questions students may have when looking for housing. These videos will be posted the week leading up to the 2020 Housing Fair on the College Heights Herald social media and website. Your apartment complex will also be provided with the video to use however you would like.

$350

Sales deadline: Feb. 6 at 4 p.m.
Promotion starts: Feb. 18
Housing Fair: Feb. 25
**Figure 2**

*Sales flyer explaining 2020 Housing Fair packages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PACKAGE</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>PACKAGE B</strong></td>
<td>$1,500</td>
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<td><strong>PACKAGE C</strong></td>
<td>$1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PACKAGE D</strong></td>
<td>$750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PACKAGE E</strong></td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PACKAGE A**
- Full-page ad in the housing guide
- 12-month listing on WKUApartments.com
- 2 premium six-foot tables on the first floor of DSU
- 3 tweets sent from @WKUHerald during the spring semester
- Quarter-page ad, full color in the College Heights Herald between Jan. 28 and Feb. 25
- Logo on posters, ads and other select promotional materials displayed across campus before the fair
- Two reserved parking permits

**PACKAGE B**
- Full-page ad in the housing guide
- 12-month listing on WKUApartments.com
- 1 six-foot table (Additional tables $150 each)
- One reserved parking permit

**PACKAGE C**
- Half-page ad in the housing guide
- 3-month listing on WKUApartments.com
- 1 six-foot table (Additional tables $150 each)
- One reserved parking permit

**PACKAGE D**
- Quarter-page ad in the housing guide
- 1-month listing on WKUApartments.com
- 1 table (Additional tables $150 each)
- One reserved parking permit

**PACKAGE E**
- Limited to single units (house, duplex, sublease) or non-property vendors
- Business card-sized ad in the housing guide
- 1-month listing on WKUApartments.com
- 1 table (Additional tables $150 each)
- One reserved parking permit

**THINGS TO KNOW**
- The WKU Housing Fair will be held in Downing Student Union. Premium tables will be located on the main floor, with other tables on the second floor.
- In the event of inclement weather on Feb. 25, the event will be held on March 3. Time for the event is 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- The College Heights Herald will distribute the housing guide on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2020.
- Additional parking spots must be reserved at the same time as your package. Additional spots will cost $30. Alternatively, all-day parking is available in a paid visitors lot across the street from DSU on a first-come, first-serve basis, and short-term (45 minute max) parking is available at meters throughout campus.
- Banners and signs can be freestanding or placed on your table. Downing Student Union does not permit material to be taped to walls or rails.
- The WKU Housing Fair is a trade show. Bring brochures and giveaways to hand out to students, or have a contest or game. The more fun, the better. Signing of leases is not permitted at the event.
- Any food distributed in Downing Student Union must be approved in advance by WKU Restaurant Group, 270-745-5242.

**Reserve Your Space**

Contact Will Hoagland  
Phone: 270-745-6285  
Email: william.hoagland@wku.edu
Figure 1

Love notes page in the Feb. 11 print edition of the WKU Herald
Figure 1

*Cherry Creative model release form implemented in spring 2020*

---

**Cherry Creative**

**Sponsored Content Release**

I hereby assign full copyright and grant permission to Cherry Creative, a division of Western Kentucky University Student Publications, to use my name, quotes, photographs and/or video footage taken of me on the date(s) below. I understand that the content will be included as part of a story being published on behalf of the sponsoring business listed below, and I grant permission for the content to be published in all future publications or ads produced by WKU Student Publications and disseminated in print, online or other mediums, on behalf of the aforementioned client, or in publications not created on behalf of a business.

I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve the finished product that may be used in conjunction with them now or in the future, whether that use is known to me, and I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of the image(s).

I hereby agree to release, defend and hold harmless Cherry Creative and WKU Student Publications and its agents or employees, including any firm publishing and/or distributing the finished product in whole or in part, whether on paper or via electronic media, from and against any claims, damages, or liability to any misuse, distortion, blurring, alteration, optical illusion or use in composite form, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in taking, processing, reduction or production of the finished product, its publication or distribution.

I am 18 years of age or older and I am competent to contract my own name. I have read this release before signing below, and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I understand that I am free to address any specific questions regarding this release prior to signing, and I agree that my failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release. A photocopy of this consent form shall be considered as valid as the original.

---

**Date(s) of interview and/or photo/video shoot**

**Sponsoring business**

**Subject’s name (print clearly)**

**Subject’s signature**

**Signature of guardian if under 18 years of age**

**Signature date**
Figure 1

Sample client email for sponsored content project communication

![Email content](image-url)
APPENDIX K

Figure 1

*Slide from writing breakout session at 2019 Cherry Creative full staff training*

---

**Pitching: what makes a good pitch?**

- **Pre-reporting**
  - Come to meetings with sources and information (the five Ws).
  - Start getting in contact and gathering information on your story idea before pitching.
    - You want to prove why this will be worth your time and the time of your readers.

- **Consider your audience**
  - Think about why our audience would want to read it — what would it mean to them?
  - Inclusivity is IMPORTANT! Make sure you have diverse sources and subjects.

- **Angle**
  - Know what has been done before by looking at previous stories.
    - If it's been covered before try to find a new angle so it isn't the same story.

- **Tip:** if you can't explain the story in two sentences it's not narrow enough.

- **ASK QUESTIONS!**
Figure 2

*Slide from photography breakout session at 2019 Cherry Creative full staff training*

---

**Lighting Portraits**

Lighting examples: [https://digital-photography-school.com/6-portrait-lighting-patterns-every-photographer-should-know/](https://digital-photography-school.com/6-portrait-lighting-patterns-every-photographer-should-know/)

Lighting gear checklist:

- Stand(s)
- Strobe(s)
- Cold shoe
- Softbox or umbrella
- Pocket wizard and cords
- Optional reflector
APPENDIX L

Figure 1

2019 Cherry Creative “Adulting” special section
## Leadership

Hayley Robb  
*Creative director*

Ryan Goodlett  
*Writing editor*

Grace Pritchett  
*Photo editor*

Emma Spainhoward  
*Design editor*

Hayley Watson  
*Video coordinator*

Sam Oldenburg  
*Adviser*

Avari Stamps  
*Advertising manager*

Will Hoagland  
*Advertising adviser*

## Writers

Jessica Brandt  
Chloe Benningfield  
Nicole Christensen  
Bekah Harper  
Abbey Norvell

## Photographers

Chloe Cooper  
Maggie Haun  
Brittany Morrison  
Hannah Vanover

## Multimedia

Lauren Bond

---

## Contents

04 Certifying success

05 Navigating your faith after college

06 The post-grad adjustment period

08 How to dress professionally

11 Wax on, wax off

12 Striking a balance: combining passions with careers

14 A booth and a brand

15 Planning the perfect wedding

16 MASH
Dear reader,

The word “adulting” is often used as a verb; to behave like an adult, to do the things that adults regularly have to do. One might interpret this as the monotonous tasks that come with more responsibility and more independence, like purchasing a home or applying for jobs.

Adulting is a period in life when the realities of our decisions take hold and we try to follow a certain checklist to achieve success. Get an amazing internship in a metropolitan area? Check. Graduate college? Check. Secure a job after walking across the stage and shaking the president’s hand? Maybe not.

The truth is, adulting is hard to master, and our hope is that this guide helps you think of adulting as more of a process, rather than an item on a to-do list. I challenge you to think of the liberation that comes with the responsibility — not all of the things you still have to do. I challenge you to take advantage of the opportunities you have at WKU to graduate with certificates like those offered in the Information Systems department (page 4), or pursue that entrepreneurial itch you’ve had for a while now (page 14).

Your life may take some unexpected turns to get you to your dream job, and that is OK (page 6). The beauty of adulting is that it is never truly mastered.

We hope you enjoy Cherry Creative’s first special section to be included in the College Heights Herald this year and find some helpful tips to fine tune your adulting.

Happy adulting,

Hayley Robb
Cherry Creative director

JOIN OUR TEAM

Calling all creatives — this could be YIU. Our team is made up of creative storytellers — writers, designers, artists, photographers and videographers with the skills to produce insightful, impactful media. We work with clients to produce creative, sponsored storytelling across platforms, providing support and resources for the College Heights Herald and Talisman. We’re also hiring advertising consultants who help local businesses find ways to reach the WKU community.

Think this could be you?
Apply at cherrycreativewku.com/jobs
Deadline to apply: Dec. 13

Questions? Email cherrycreativewku@gmail.com
Data exists everywhere in the world, from refrigerators to watches. The ability to decipher that data is called “data analytics” and is a skill that students can learn at WKU.

The Information Systems Department of the Gordon Ford College of Business offers courses in data analytics that can contribute credits towards majors, minors or an applied data analytics certificate.

The 18-hour applied data analytics certificate became available to WKU students in fall 2016. The six required classes to obtain the certificate involve statistics, spreadsheets and business data analytics. Students are also required to take two electives, which must be approved by the College of Business and incorporate data in some form.

Information Systems Department Chair Ray Blankenship is excited about the certificate and the opportunities it offers students through improved communication and widespread careers.

“As with the applied data analytics, we’re trying to use a couple of our data analytics courses along with some of our elective courses so that students have a better understanding of how they might take data that’s in one area and relate it to another to make decisions,” Blankenship said.

A common misconception about the data analytics certificate is that it only consists of math classes. Although math plays a role in data analytics, there is more to it.

Brandenburg senior Olivia Kessinger said she expected the certificate to be “difficult graphs and complicated information” but it has surprised her in being more business-driven.

“It’s honestly a little bit more creative than I thought because you can interpret data in so many different ways,” Kessinger said. “It’s not just a black and white type of thing.”

Kessinger said her favorite part about the certificate has been the real-world knowledge she has gained. “You can think of data as the new oil,” Blankenship said. “If you have this data, then you can mine this data for information, for knowledge, and do things people hadn’t considered before.”

Students who can understand and decipher data have an enormous competitive edge in the workplace, Blankenship said.

Falmouth senior Kaylin Wells chose to add the certificate to her marketing major because she knew it would be valuable in the workforce.

“For example, a marketing major can get one of these data analytics courses and add it to the ones you’ve already taken,” Wells said. “It really just expands on the concepts you’ve already learned about and talked about. It gives you the chance to apply those in real scenarios.”

Wells said the certificate stands out on resumes and turns into a great talking point, so much so that she has even been asked about it in interviews.

“When you go to graduate, you’re going to work for a business,” Blankenship said. “So anything that business is doing – having more knowledge about how to analyze the data and present it and communicate the results of that data is going to make you more marketable than someone that hasn’t been exposed to that.”

For more information about the data analytics certificate visit https://www.wku.edu/bdan/certificate.php.
Recent graduates, soon-to-be graduates and current students all dream about what they'll do with their life in the "real world" after college. This transition, however, can often be frightening.

When adversity arises and everything around us seems to change, Scripture tells us that Jesus is the solid rock we can build our lives upon. (Matthew 7:24-27)

If someone is determined to follow God’s will for their life, they might find it comforting to know that one cannot make a decision that will completely take them out of his will.

God’s will is all out of love, and love gives us a lot of freedom. Living Hope college minister Hunter Sewell said that with God, there is not a "secret will" that has to be figured out, but there is freedom in knowing that living a life that loves Christ and loves others will put us exactly where God wants us to be.

"Relationships, jobs, careers, incomes — things like that are pretty transient," Sewell said. "But having your identity centered on something that is lasting, that doesn’t change, that won’t be shaken — that’s something that I think is worth investing and putting your life in."

Life will change, but Jesus won’t, Sewell said. He provided tips for navigating one’s faith through the transition after college and beyond.

"Make a very diligent effort to discipline yourself to get up early to study (the Bible) in the mornings," he said. "When you study in the mornings you have that quiet time, and your heart is aligned with Christ. The rest of your day looks a lot more like Christ."

Sewell also encouraged finding a community to do life alongside. He said the Christian life isn’t meant to be lived in isolation. Sewell said authority comes from the truth of God’s word, and it’s important to find a “Bible-believing, Bible-preaching” church that gives you the opportunity to serve.

Savannah Snyder, a WKU alumna and member of Living Hope, said getting involved with the Young Professionals ministry at Living Hope helped her find her community. She advised others to do the same to gain a greater sense of belonging.

"Get involved with a group of people in your similar stage of life who share your beliefs so you can walk with each other and encourage each other through all the craziness," Snyder said. "God created us to be in community — don’t miss out on that."

Snyder said God has taught her to find her encouragement, identity and worth in what he says about her instead of how she feels, how successful she is or what other people say about her or her job performance.

"It’s been helpful to look back at Scripture and remind myself that no matter what, God loves me," Snyder said. "He says I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I am a masterpiece. I am chosen, forgiven, not forsaken."

2019 WKU graduate Christina Bacon said she is still learning the big things about her faith.

"I’m learning more and more about the Gospel and how good and holy (God) is," Bacon said. "I’ve realized that I have learned so much, more than I ever thought I could learn after college."

The Gospel translates to the "good news," and denotes Jesus coming to Earth as fully God and fully man, living a perfect life, dying a death he did not deserve in our place and rising again so that by putting our trust in him we too can have eternal life.

Bacon is now a freelance photographer, and she recognizes she’s been gifted by the Lord with her talents in order to glorify him.

"He’s the only reason I do what I do," Bacon said. "He’s the only reason I create — because he’s the ultimate creator."

One’s ultimate responsibility is to make disciples, Sewell said. In the Bible, the great commission is to “go and make disciples of all nations,” (Matthew 28:16-20) and that means to share the Gospel and love of Jesus with everyone they encounter.

"I am an ambassador for Christ, that’s my purpose," Sewell said. "Whatever the case, that’s my base identity. I’m a follower of Christ and therefore I’m a disciple-maker."

Sewell encourages people to read about Jesus’ life in the book of John. He explained that to know Jesus is to love him, and the more Sewell falls in love with Jesus, the more he wants to be like him.
Alumna Ellery Burkhead from Hopkinsville graduated with a degree in psychological science in May 2018. She did not know what she wanted to do, so she worked at a few places until she found her dream job at HopBridge, an autism therapy center, in Bowling Green. "I had the power to make my own path and to choose what career field I wanted to go into," Burkhead said. She is now pursuing her master’s in speech language pathology.

THE POST-GRAD ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

By Jess Brandt

Hannah Beth Brackin graduated in December 2018. She packed up her life and moved to Cincinnati. Yet 7 months later, she was back in Bowling Green.

"I felt like a failure," Brackin said, an Owensboro native.

Brackin graduated from WKU with a degree in psychological sciences. She decided to move to Cincinnati to work a full-time insurance job while also working for a non-profit organization.

Brackin said she discovered rather quickly the insurance job wasn’t for her, and the non-profit work she was doing wasn’t exactly what she thought it was going to be after all.

"I had never been a homebody," Brackin said. "But I realized being four hours from home was just too much."

Brackin moved back to Bowling Green to start a graduate program at WKU. However, a week before her program started, she learned it was no longer accredited and decided to drop out of the program. She is now working as a college ministry assistant with Living Hope and a part-time substitute teacher.

Brackin said she felt like she was having an identity crisis and was worried she was wasting her time and money. She said she was working with people who had their life figured out and it made her feel inferior. When she first moved back to Bowling Green, she said she hated when people asked her what she was up to.

"There is this expectation that you are supposed to graduate college and get a dream job," she said. Brackin said she has had to learn to be patient through the process of life after graduation.

She said she learned to enjoy "me time" more than she ever had before and started asking herself, "What is one small thing I can do to get to where I want to be?"
Brackin is far from the only graduate to grapple with post-graduation pressures. WKU alumna Ellery Burkhead said she didn’t know what she wanted to do after she graduated in May 2018.

“I really wanted to take a year to figure out what I do and don’t like and figure out what I truly want to pursue,” Burkhead said.

She went to work as a counselor at a three-month Christian summer camp in Texas after graduating and came back in August with no job.

She later got a job with Warren County Public Schools as an instructional assistant, but she said she knew that wasn’t a long-term job for her and was searching for other jobs.

Over Christmas break she found her current job at HopeBridge in Bowling Green. HopeBridge is an autism therapy center Burkhead said she never knew was just miles from campus.

“Society tells you that you have to do the biggest thing,” she said. “That you have to live in the biggest city. It is crazy to think that my dream job was sitting miles from campus.”

Burkhead said the time after graduation was nothing short of stressful. She said the four to five months spent looking for a job felt like a really long time, but she realized in the grand scheme of life, it really wasn’t that long.

“You go through college and you follow these steps that everyone follows and after college it just isn’t like that,” she said.

While Burkhead stressed for months about finding a job where she was happy, she said the experience has been worth it because she has found her dream job.

“There are jobs you will have to do in the meantime that aren’t your favorite just because that is what happens in life, but it’s definitely important to wait for the job that is right for you,” Burkhead said.

While Burkhead and Brackin struggled with post-grad life, WKU offers resources to help alleviate pressure for current and former students.

Becky Tinker, associate director of the Center for Career and Professional Development, said her offices offer a walk-in service and help with anything related to life after WKU.

“We help students look at what they want to do and help them get there,” Tinker said. “What do you want your life to look like? Where do you want to live? What kind of lifestyle do you want to have? And what steps can we take to make that happen?”

Tinker said a lot of students either need help making their dreams reality, or they struggle with having a dream at all. She said her offices help students on both ends of the spectrum.

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“People think there is a magic website, a magic place where you go and find this list of jobs, and next to one job is your name,” Tinker said. “They think that it is an easy process. It truly is a matter of the more time you put into the process, the quicker you will find something.”

She said she thinks a lot of grads struggle with “adulting” after college.

“There are a lot of freedoms that come with being responsible for yourself and being able to pay your own way that a lot of students don’t focus on,” Tinker said.

Tinker said a helpful tip for students is to think in terms of a two-year plan as opposed to a five or 10-year plan. She said life changes too quickly to constrain yourself to a plan that far ahead.

“Your first job is a first job,” Tinker said. “It could be the key to all your other jobs, but it could just be a first job. I understand the fear of ‘What if I make a mistake? What if I pick a job and I hate it?’ Well, you look for a new job, quit the old job and start a new one.”

Brackin said she isn’t where she wants to be yet, but she is OK with that. She said she knows she is not a failure and that she just has to wait for the right door to open for her.

“I think it’s important to stop comparing,” Brackin said. “People only post on Instagram if they have everything figured out. Everyone’s timetable and story is different.”

Ellery Burkhead

What is one small thing I can do to get to where I want to be?

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Looking the part is important when it comes to making a good first impression at a job interview, so here are some tips and tricks from Adrienne Browning, an assistant director and professional development specialist in WKU’s Center for Career and Professional Development.

- Wear closed-toed shoes
- No more than one ring
- Skirt only if it extends below the knee
- No distracting jewelry
- Dresses are OK when paired with a blazer
- No overpowering perfume
- No coffee in hand
- Black belt or brown belt
- Match belt to shoes
- No gum
- Clean-shaven
- Clean fingernails
- Full suit preferred
- Dresses are OK when paired with a blazer
- No overpowering perfume
- No distracting jewelry

Words and photos by Brittany Morrison
Illustrations by Hayley Gatlin
When it comes to waxing, you’ve probably heard it all before: the good, the bad and the made up (cue the Steve Carell clip and his sub-par chest waxing debacle). Brand experts in facial and body waxing and Bowling Green’s own specialty waxing studio, Waxing the City, are here to dispel the rumors and prove that waxing is the best hair removal method available and the choice of many busy professionals — both male and female.

With skin-calming pre and post wax treatments containing soothing, natural ingredients available with every service, an urban-chic-meets-spa vibe and a luxurious experience with lasting results, first-time clients wonder what took them so long to embrace the waxing lifestyle.

Waxing is certainly not a new concept. As a matter of fact, it’s an ancient one. Since 2003, the Waxing the City brand – part of a larger company called Self-Esteem Brands – prides itself on newer methods, better waxes imported from Europe just for them and educating the client on aftercare to extend the incredibly smooth benefits of choosing waxing over shaving.

Clients learn the luxuries of whipped sugar scrubs to hydrate and exfoliate, how to properly dry brush and its benefits and can even try multiple ways to fill their perfectly waxed brows (powder, pencil, gel or pomade). First-timers get a 50% discount off their service and access to a membership called Club Orange with discounted service packages available for those who find their new must-do beauty routine.

Loyal clients and Waxing the City Bowling Green’s licensed cerologists (waxing experts trained to the company’s standards) have compiled a list of the top ten reasons to become a regular waxer. It just makes sense when you’re making the move to adulting full-time.

Waxing the City Bowling Green is located at 2300 Gary Farms Blvd. just in front of PetSmart. The studio is open seven days a week, and while appointments are recommended, walk-ins are also welcome.

The studio carries the finest brands for exfoliating and moisturizing and is the go-to place for holiday gifts for every budget.

Book online at waxingthecity.com or use the app. They love to answer your waxing questions and can also get your appointment in the books at 270-938-2508. Free Wi-Fi and free product smells. Waxing the City. Let’s go there.

Facebook @waxingthecitybgky
Instagram @waxingthecitybowlinggreen
Figure 11

Striking a balance:
Combining passions with careers

By Nicole Christensen

Students commonly have to add another major or minor alongside their primary major. And sometimes, like in my case, those areas of interest don’t exactly overlap.

“That’s a weird combination, journalism and dance. Which one are you going to do for your career?”

I usually respond with the question, “Why not both?” Followed up with a look of disapproval from them.

It is often assumed that a career must become our only priority but these three people have found ways to balance their hobbies with their careers.

**Reporter and drummer**

Josh Shortt is a reporter for WNKY, where he films and edits videos about education. He is also a member of his own alternative band that plays what he describes as a “Cage the Elephant meets the Beatles” style of music.

“As much as I love what I do as a reporter, I feel like music holds more of my heart and soul because that’s just more of how I can express what I’m feeling,” Shortt said.

Shortt has been interested in music since he was young. He has been playing instruments for 14 years and plays the drums, bass, guitar, piano and ukulele. He said he couldn’t make a career with only music but wanted to make sure it played a role in his life, regardless.

“Music is my way of recharging,” Shortt said. “Music is kind of what powers me to do my stuff at work and to do it so well.”

Shortt said he wakes up at 3 a.m. to find time to play his instruments among his hectic life, since finding time can be difficult, especially having a career in news.

“When I started the news, I was swamped with just my job, and I was kinda worried that I wouldn’t be able to fit music in my life,” Shortt said. “Today, I feel like I can’t do one without the other.”

Finding the right ways to balance a career and passions is hard, especially at first, Shortt said.

“You may feel like it’s better to drop one completely, but my recommendation is to keep at it as long as you possibly can,” Shortt said.

Shortt said he had to push things around in order to fit music in his life.

“If you’re passionate about it, you don’t really need a big push to go for it because you’re just drawn to it naturally,” Shortt said.

**Marketing professor and online gamer**

Patricia Todd started playing World of Warcraft 15 years ago with her family. It was one way she spent her free time outside of her career.

When Todd went to a gaming convention, she saw how much the industry was growing and how much marketing was involved, which she called “a marketer’s dream.” She saw the potential to incorporate that interest into her job as a WKU marketing professor, which involves teaching and researching marketing topics.

“It’s not just playing games anymore,” Todd said. “It’s a legitimate industry now.”

Since 2015, Todd has focused her research on communication in the livestream gaming community, with an emphasis on differences between genders.

Todd said she hasn’t run into
Up until three years ago, Sara Thomason worked in the film industry as an additional, a film crew member who only works when needed. She often encountered slow periods in work between November and February, which prompted her to find a hobby. After receiving a Food Network magazine from her father, she decided to try baking.

“I sort of got obsessed with it,” Thomason said. “I loved it, and I started making cakes, pies and all kinds of stuff, so it just kinda snowballed from there.”

Thomason still made time for baking after becoming an assistant professor in WKU’s film department three years ago.

Film is Thomason’s career and she said it’s what she thinks about all the time, but baking serves as her “hibernation mode” from the rest of her life.

“When I bake, I don’t think about anything because it’s so precise,” Thomason said.

She tries to bake three times a week. She wakes up at 5:30 a.m. to make sure she has enough time to bake and get to class on time in the morning. It can be a perk for her classes when she brings baked goods to her students.

As far as hobbies go, Thomason said baking is one of the least expensive ones, but is still more expensive than people may think. Thomason said investing in oneself to further certain interests is very important.

“I don’t think people understand how important hobbies are to your mental health and your general well-being,” Thomason said.

Some people can be consumed by one aspect of their lives, like their careers, and if something goes wrong in that area, it can feel as though their whole world is falling apart, Thomason said.

“Whereas if you have hobbies, it gives you a chance to take a break and not think about things,” she said.

Thomason sought out a job that would allow her more time to spend doing things she enjoys and being with people she cares about.

“I wanted a little bit more,” Thomason said.
Ashley Rogers always wanted to run a business. Though her full-time job is working as a dental hygienist, something always called her to the prospect of entrepreneurship on the side.

“For me, entrepreneurship was always an interest because it gives you a major sense of accomplishment in terms of getting something done on your own,” Rogers said.

She said the opportunity to have control over how she ran things and the ability to make decisions for something gave her a sense of pride.

In 2017, Rogers came across the mobile photo booth business TapSnap. She started running TapSnap as a side gig to her dental hygienist job, and her first event was in July of 2017.

She said some of the things that drew her to TapSnap was having a smaller support team and corporate office that allowed her to feel connected to the business itself.

“It has a close-knit family feel,” said Rogers. “You sort of know everybody by name, and it’s really helpful to be able to feel comfortable with them when you might need help.”

Rogers said she didn’t have much experience with photography or technology, but due to the simplicity of the equipment, she was able to pick it up quickly.

“Any event that has at least one electrical outlet can use TapSnap,” Rogers said. “You really just have to plug it in, and it’s good to go.”

TapSnap is different from other photo booth companies in that it was created to serve as an alternative to “traditional box-style photo booths,” according to a TapSnap press release.

“Specializing in plug-and-play, open-air, digitally-integrated photo booth solutions to suit each business, TapSnap’s fully-customizable, permanent-installation kiosks help to retain customers, increase brand awareness, and grow business through fun, engaging, one-of-a-kind event photo experiences,” TapSnap said in the press release.

Rogers was drawn to the unique kiosk-like photo experience and felt like Southcentral Kentucky would be a great place for the business.

“I feel like there really wasn’t something like TapSnap in Bowling Green and the surrounding areas,” Rogers said. “I knew I could do something really cool with TapSnap that hadn’t been seen around here before.”

Rogers said she thinks any entrepreneur can bring growth to a community, and that’s part of why they are so important.

“Anyone that comes in and starts a business and offers a new experience is offering a new outlet for the community as well,” she said.

Rogers has had a lot of success with charity events and said one event yields an average of $1,000. She has been present for events ranging from local Bowling Green charity balls to corporate events at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville.

Radio personality Tony Rose has used TapSnap for multiple events, but his first experience with the company was at his “Stuff the Bus” charity event in 2017.

Rose said that TapSnap added a unique experience for attendees with the “take home” photos that TapSnap provides.

“The TapSnap model is pretty much self explanatory for a client to understand,” Rose said. “We provide simple info, and she and TapSnap take care of the rest.”

TapSnap was hired at the Special Needs Expo event in Bowling Green where Rogers said she was touched by the way the kids and their families loved the booth.

“I had families tell me that this is the best family photo they have been able to get,” Rogers said. “For them to be so happy with such a simple photo was really special to me.”

Rogers said with the right person operating the franchise, TapSnap has a lot of potential.

“I look back, and I’m like ‘How in the world did I do that?’” Rogers said. “It was all in my mindset. Your mind controls everything. Your attitude controls everything.”

And although Rogers has loved running her TapSnap business on the side, she wants to keep her full-time dental hygienist job a priority and has decided to sell TapSnap.

Rogers said she never took full advantage of TapSnap in terms of the types of events and markets she could cater to such as weddings and sporting events.

Someone who loves interacting with people, interacting with the community and building relationships with businesses and events in their community would be ideal for running TapSnap, Rogers said.

“I just feel like TapSnap could be huge with someone else,” she said. “That’s all I want for it.”

Those interested in purchasing TapSnap can reach Ashley Rogers at 270-772-4163.
Weddings consist of details that require hours of planning and organization. Dafnel DeVasier, K&B Events, Tootie Finkbone - Wedding Planner and the Knot want to guide you along your journey to solidify true love.

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Whether you prefer indoors or outdoors, SOKY Bridal Expo provides all different types of venues. Ironwood, Hidden Homestead and Highland Stables will offer their wedding venue services at the expo in 2020.

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SOKY Bridal Expo wants brides and grooms alike to choose their own creative style. Regiss Bridal & Prom, David’s Bridal, Michelle’s Consignment and Men’s Warehouse can help brides and grooms dress to impress for their wedding.

Let Them Eat Cake

You can have your cake and eat it too. Cakes by Joni Warren - JD Bakery, Sweet Temptations and Mission Catering Company can design the cake of your dreams.

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From appetizers to desserts, SOKY Bridal Expo presents a wide variety of food businesses for you to try. Mariah’s, The Bistro and Cambridge Market and Cafe will have dishes to satisfy your cravings and treat your guests during your big day.

Let photography businesses presented at the expo take care of documenting your day. Scott Skaggs Photography, Christa Cato Photography and Taylor York Photography want to capture lasting moments at your wedding.

Picture this: Your soon-to-be spouse is walking down the aisle. Sunlight streams through the windows, and the lights around the venue twinkle. Your venue is decorated just how you imagined it would be on your wedding day. Everyone in attendance is watching the beautiful scene in front of them unfold. Despite the chaos and stress of planning a wedding, none of that seems to matter as it all comes together on the big day. You feel a tear start to run down your face because the day you get to marry the love of your life is finally happening.
How will you fair in the game of life?

1. Fill out the categories below.
2. In the middle of the circle draw a spiral.
3. Count the number of gaps in the spiral.
4. Count up to that number beginning with the first line of future spouse, crossing out the options as you reach that number going through each category.
5. Once there is only one option left in a category, circle it. Your future has been made!