



All aboard: How Purdue University increased their social media engagement by 24%

Known for their engineering school, Purdue University takes a scientific approach with everything they do—including social media. And when it comes to investing in their digital presence, Purdue is going full steam ahead.

“Purdue’s social media content is used to tell stories about Purdue Boilermakers and connect with students—past, present and future,” says Assistant Director of Digital Engagement, Abby Eddy.

When Abby jumped onboard in 2019, she was faced with building a team from the ground up to broaden social's reach and impact across the Purdue community. The Digital Engagement team was born, and has become a well-oiled machine. Thanks to the team including—three social media professionals and five interns, followers now engage with Purdue's social content more than ever.

Purdue uses [Sprout Social](#) as a cross-departmental hub to level up social listening, create robust reports and keep their content on track.

“We use Sprout's Profile and Post Performance Reports to identify our top posts and to see what engagement looks like across channels monthly. We're always looking at how we can replicate the success of top posts on other channels, and adjusting content accordingly.”

Abby Eddy

Assistant Director of Digital Engagement, Purdue University

Engineering engagement for students and alumni

The Digital Engagement team manages all of the University's non-athletic channels across Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok and Pinterest with more than 900,000 followers combined. And as their name suggests, they have a laser-focus on [engagement](#).

“We’ve always had the motto that you can have a million followers, but if only a thousand are interacting with your content, your channels are useless,” Abby tells us.

Using Sprout takes the guesswork out of understanding what content resonates. “We use [Sprout’s Profile and Post Performance Reports](#) to identify our top posts and to see what engagement looks like across channels monthly,” says Abby. “We’re always looking at how we can replicate the success of top posts on other channels, and adjusting content accordingly.”

Sometimes, diving into analytics uncovers surprises that guide future strategies.

“We found that people love our nostalgic ‘then and now content’—it unifies alumni as well as current students, especially on Instagram. But it was surprising to find out that these posts performed really well on LinkedIn,” Abby says.

Purdue also uses Sprout to make sure they never miss an opportunity to interact with their audience. “Our interns are in the [Smart Inbox](#) daily,” says Social Media Specialist, Kolby Hagmaier. “They filter one channel at a time and look at comments from the previous 24 hours with the hope that everything is marked ‘complete’ at all times.”

The system they've developed is working. With 4.5 million total engagements, they're already 151% to goal for the 2021-2022 school year.

“We use Tags for every piece of content that we publish within Sprout, from overarching brand pillar tags to post-specific ones .”

Kolby Hagmaier

Social Media Specialist, Purdue University

Where Boiler Up means listen up

Purdue's social team uses [Sprout's Listening](#) feature to keep their ear to the ground and finger on the pulse of campus conversations and brand health. “We have alerts set up to help monitor spikes in conversation around specific topics,” Social Media Manager Ashlee Shroyer tells us. “It's a helpful way to immediately identify if something is gaining traction—good or bad.”

In catching a crisis, speed matters—especially if a request for more information comes straight from the top.

“We’ve received requests from our President’s office to quickly run a report on topics and how they’re appearing on social media,” Ashlee tells us. “With our general ‘Purdue University’ topic, we’re able to search quickly by keywords to provide a fast snapshot.”

Social listening has also helped them collaborate with the Strategic Communication team to keep an eye on potential crises before they spin out. This keeps them proactive—not reactive. “It’s hard to know when something is starting to bubble up,” Abby tells us. “So if the Strategic Communication team gets wind of something, they can ask us to create Listening Topics to monitor it.”

But listening isn’t all crisis mode and no fun. The team also uses the Word Cloud (see an example of the Word Cloud for Sprout’s fictional coffee brand below) to identify unexpected gems that inspire content—from conversations and themes to emojis.

“We see a lot of emojis in there,” Kolby tells us. “We’ll implement those same emojis in our posts to stay in lockstep with our audience.”

Using Tags to keep tabs on content and connect students

Purdue has a unique marketing superpower—an ambassador program of around 50 students who bring a first-hand perspective to their digital presence.

“Boiler Ambassadors use Sprout for their student-run Instagram account,” says Ashlee. “We provide Sprout training to all of the students so that they can publish and tag content, as well as run their own reports.”

After receiving Sprout and brand voice training, the students have free reign of their Instagram account and create content themselves. Using a special tag just for the ambassadors helps the student team and the Digital Engagement Team filter their specific posts.

With student ambassadors, interns and a full-time team powering Purdue’s social presence, maintaining one brand voice when responding to comments is key—especially when you’re fresh off of a 2020 rebrand.

Sprout is used as a cross-team hub where everyone can find pre-written responses in a unified brand voice—both evergreen FAQ responses and templates for events like big games or commencement.

“We have specific language we want to weave into comments and responses,” Abby emphasizes. “So we created a set of pre-populated responses in the [Sprout Social Asset Library](#) that our interns can pull from, which gives them the flexibility to respond to comments on the fly but also makes sure they’re comfortable with the language we’re using.”

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Ashlee Shroyer

Social Media Manager, Purdue University

Keeping teamwork on track and revolutionizing reporting

A robust social team needs a robust organizational system to match. The Digital Engagement team has mastered the art of tracking and reporting on content. “We use **Tags** for every piece of content that we publish within Sprout, from overarching brand pillar tags to post-specific ones,” says Kolby.

They use the Tag Performance Report on a weekly basis to help their whole department quickly understand the impact and success of content. And they’ve used Sprout to **revolutionize digital reporting**—on their own team and interdepartmentally.

“The analytics we pull from Sprout are a major piece of the monthly digital performance reports we share with the full marketing department,” Abby tells us. “Those highlight everything from our social metrics and campaign updates to website analytics.”

Using Sprout, they are able to share social findings with the larger marketing department to celebrate successes, suggest data-driven changes and provide insight into their efforts.

Their ability to prove their efforts and results with data has built trust between the Digital Engagement team and marketing leadership—granting them the autonomy to post content that works.

“Sometimes we have to push back on the amount of content that we’re asked to push out because the volume of posts has gone up. But when that happens, we see engagement dip a little bit,” Abby tells us.

All aboard the future of social at Purdue

Purdue has recognized and harnessed the power of social. They’re even using it to power larger digital initiatives. Having met and exceeded their 2021-2022 engagement goals, the Digital Engagement Team already has their eyes set on what’s next. In the future, they plan to even more closely track the role social plays in driving audiences to their admission site and converting them into future Boilermakers.

If you’re ready to connect your teams and your audience through the power of social media using Sprout Social, [start your free 30-day trial](#) or [request a personalized demo](#). Get ready to tap into the game-changing insights waiting for you and your brand.



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