

University of Iowa News Release

Nov. 3, 2011

### **Loose-meat tweets? UI students help Maid-Rite expand social media presence**

A group of University of Iowa marketing students is helping Maid-Rite restaurants develop loose-meat tweets.

The five undergraduates in the Tippie College of Business' Marketing Institute are working with the Des Moines-based restaurant company to develop a social media strategy for its 70 franchisee-owned restaurants across the country and improve its online presence. The work is part of the company's effort to increase its social media presence and help expand its chain of loose-meat sandwich restaurants.

The students started working on the plan at the start of the fall semester with a visit to the company's headquarters in Des Moines and lunch at its new West Des Moines restaurant, courtesy of Maid-Rite owners Bradley Burt, president & CEO, and Tania Burt, executive vice president.

"It was a great experience, and we learned a lot about the company," says Taylor Fuerst, a UI senior who is leading the student team.

Maid-Rite is one of Iowa's iconic brands and has been serving its unique ground beef loose-meat sandwiches across the Midwest since 1926. Many Maid-Rites are still located in small and medium-sized towns, and the company is in the midst of an aggressive growth plan targeting larger urban and suburban areas. For instance, new restaurants were recently opened in Dallas and Denver.

Part of Maid-Rite's marketing strategy is to increase communication with its customer base and to attract new franchisee prospects by strengthening its social media presence. Fuerst says one of the company's challenges is that many of its customers consist of older generations who don't often use social media, such as Fuerst's own grandparents. She says she has childhood memories of frequent visits she and her grandparents made to a Maid-Rite in her hometown of Peoria, Ill.

She says one of the focuses of their strategy will be to bring in younger diners and increase overall awareness for the brand.

"The social component is an effort to reach out to younger consumers as a part of the company's broader overall growth strategy," says Fuerst. "We're helping them to expand their market and create attention toward the brand with a stronger social media presence and improved website."

Fuerst says a single semester isn't enough time to develop a comprehensive set of specific suggestions, so her team's recommendations are a general, wide-angle view of broad ideas. They include hiring a social media consultant to develop specific initiatives, one of which should include a new store-opening strategy that builds buzz in communities through social media when a new Maid-Rite restaurant opens.

"Social media is hard to master and still new enough that nobody has all the answers at this point, but you still need to have a social media presence to stay ahead of your competition," Fuerst says.

"We not only are very appreciative to have our company involved with the University of Iowa Marketing Institute in the social media project, but we are very impressed by the professionalism, knowledge, and the great ideas that the student team members have developed," says Bradley Burt.

"Every student member of the Maid-Rite social media team in our meetings have always come prepared with new ideas and recommendations that they have perfectly articulated to us to help Maid-Rite in our social media presence, which we have been very impressed with," says Tania Burt.

Rob Rouwenhorst, the Tippie marketing faculty member who oversees the Marketing Institute, says Maid-Rite is the latest client the two-year-old organization has had the pleasure of working with. Past clients have included ACT, HON Manufacturing, UI Hospitals and Clinics, EOS International, and Young Africa.

He says the work gives marketing students an opportunity to use what they've learned in class in an actual business setting. Students meet with company executives, develop marketing strategies and tactics to implement for the company, and provide marketing advice about a broad range of marketing challenges that clients face.

STORY SOURCE: University of Iowa News Service, 300 Plaza Centre One, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-2500

MEDIA CONTACT: Rob Rouwenhorst, lecturer in marketing, [robert-rouwenhorst@uiowa.edu](mailto:robert-rouwenhorst@uiowa.edu), 319-335-3753; Tom Snee, 319-384-0010 (office), 319-541-8434 (cell), [tom-snee@uiowa.edu](mailto:tom-snee@uiowa.edu)