

Interview with Zakary Klick (PR Professional)

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Executive Summary

For this interview, I asked several Q&A questions to Zakary Klick. Zakary graduated from Alfred University with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications Studies with Magna Cum Laude Latin Honors. After graduating college, he started working at Finger Lakes Premier Properties as a Business Analyst for several years. In this role, he facilitated the launch of their new website in June of 2017, implemented bi-weekly SEO auditing procedures to optimize website functionality, and organized cross-departmental roundtables. He then worked at the University of Rochester's Simon School of Business as a Marketing Coordinator where he developed retargeting campaigns, designed a Lead Gen Sitemap in Illustrator, and presented monthly website recordings of prospective leads to identify areas of improvement. Currently, he is the Digital Marketing Manager at Centene Corporation where he manages the Fidelis Care (Centene Subsidiary) website, leverages A/B testing and path exploration, and retools default reporting in GA4 to align with real business segments conversion optimization. He also holds certifications in machine learning, financial markets, marketing cloud development, programmatic advertising, Google Ads measurement, and technical SEO certifications. Zakary will be pursuing his Master of Business Administration (MBA) in the spring semester of 2025 from Louisiana State University (LSU).

Question 1: How does Centene integrate public relations strategies with digital marketing initiatives to ensure cohesive messaging? Can you provide an example of a campaign where PR and digital efforts complement each other?

Answer: “There are several ways. So, starting with logistics first and foremost, there is always a comprehensive project management system. With this software, it is customized to our specific business needs and goals. We can fluently bring in other department heads and other individuals who'll be required to sign off on them, and then provide input where it is needed. Then it goes into planning. Some state approval is required for the majority of digital marketing campaigns as you may or may not be aware. These initiatives need to be planned well in advance. And then we

are talking months in advance for most of these. Most are going to require internal approval before they're turned over to the state. They're going to be done in tandem with PR, so we'll have so much more time in advance to get the proper news coverage, if applicable. That's what we would say is the logistics and the planning."

Question 2: In an industry like health care, where trust is critical, what role does Centene's digital marketing play in building and maintaining relationships with the public? What specific strategies do you use to manage Centene's reputation online?

Answer: "That's probably the most important one is what our company reputation or brand is. I manage the website of the subsidiary Fidelis Care. Starting from that point, anytime there is a critical update needed, we usually have a banner that goes atop the Website page. I would go secondly, to social media. When you're in health care or any business, you're going to get negative publicity where there's a lot of pathos, certainly in the industry. It's individuals, health, or your family members sometimes. So, if a service is not offered or marketed properly, you get very frustrated members. We respond, with those that we have on the social media side of it and, how they're responding to make sure the individual's needs are addressed and, that we're responding in an appropriate, fashion. It is absolutely critical to make sure we are responding accordingly. I'd say between social media and the website, these are our core ways of maintaining our reputation."

Question 3: What challenges do you face when managing Centene's digital presence, particularly with regard to crisis communication or sensitive issues? How do you ensure that messaging aligns with Centene's core values during these times?

Answer: “The first part is just the timing. Usually when we have, as you know, any form of an initiative or marketing strategy, we like to plan things in far advance. We’ve seen that this helps when it comes to the ability to crisis communication manage. We have the core members involved to get the line the essential line of communication out. You may, depending on the situation, have to cut some areas because of the timeliness, and that supersedes the issues of getting hundreds of approvals that will slow the communications process. On the second part, we all have a general, I would say, a script that we follow and I don’t think this is customary or specific to just us but, our culture is usually ready to have a bucket under to catch things so to speak if they fall. This would be for really any type of crisis that you can foresee. The general protocol is different for each individual circumstance and, the certain mediums that its playing on. But in most cases, there’s a general script in which the teammates follow for certain protocols that is reviewed by management to make sure that we’re all aligned with brand standards.”

Question 4: With the rise of AI and data-driven marketing, how does Centene leverage these tools to enhance its digital marketing and PR efforts? Can you discuss any recent technological advancements that have significantly impacted Centene’s communication strategies?

Answer: So, I love to talk about this topic often. I think AI is not as far along as some individuals may think. I don’t think it’s further along in regard to the human elements of marketing and PR. Meaning, that there’s a mix on the PR side you’re always going to need individuals, writing, and even what you’re doing now, interviewing. These shape the environment that they’re in making those fields so great and AI cannot do that effectively as of yet. AI has more of a play in terms of data analysis that goes into post-campaign analysis, paid

advertisements reactions or views on social media, and search engine analytics. In marketing, we can look at different audiences that are targeted, how the ads perform, and how they're engaging with the ads. I think the digital marketing side has been most impacted by AI. As mentioned, data analysis and data mining are things AI is good with but, I would say there are other facets, such as PR, and internal communications, that require more of that human touch that has not been impacted by AI."

Me: Thank you for your time with this Q&A Mr. Klick I enjoyed our sit down and the opportunity to pick your brain for this assignment.

Zakary: Of course, any time! I always have the opportunity to share my view of the industry and where it is going.

I learned many things from this sit-down interview with Zakary. One of the things I learned was that it is important to have an effective communication tool like a website to be very clean from top to bottom. There should not be a bunch of spelling grammar and punctuation errors because your message will get lost if your clients cannot read what you are saying. It is also important to monitor consumer feedback and attitudes during crises and during non-crisis times. We often discuss in this class identifying specific publics and the language associated with appropriate mediums. Zakary mentioned that recognizing a certain medium is important to understanding what messages or services are appropriate to be marketed or communicated. If you do not recognize your medium and audience, it is possible to lose the message entirely and deter your audience completely from what you want them to know. This is especially prevalent in the healthcare industry where what you are saying matters right down to the last sentence, as

Zakary mentioned, people will see your errors and complain about not being able to understand or obtain a service they require because you did not relay the message correctly.

In conclusion, it is important when navigating the digital spaces, that you make sure your message is clear and easy to understand. It can be easy to cause confusion and dysfunction which can lead to a loss in stakeholders or clients. Understanding the medium and audience has never been more critical in the age of digital marketing and communications.