

Design of an Online Community:

The Pushy Advisor

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<https://voneill327.wixsite.com/pushyadvisor>

The Pushy Advisor is a community of undergraduate advisors who are interested in using proactive advising techniques. These can range from mobile advising at campus events to using push technology such as text messaging to reach out to students. The resources of The Pushy Advisor will provide advisors with information on these techniques, and a place to discuss ideas and ask peers for advice.

Advising is an important aspect of student life and has an impact on student retention and graduation rates. Only 59% of students in undergraduate programs complete a degree in six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Tinto (2012) noted the critical link between effective advising and student retention. The Executive Director of NACADA, the National Academic Advising Association, notes that advising is not the entire solution to the retention problem, but that effective advising can have a dramatic impact on student retention (Nutt, 2003).

In the traditional model of academic advising, a student contacts their advisor, and makes an appointment, often during the registration period. Proactive advising may involve opening pop-up advisement booths at campus events or reaching out to at-risk students via text message to address issues before they result in failed courses (Aiken-Wisniewski & Allen, 2005). The Pushy Advisor website and forum is intended to help advisors who are interested in these techniques connect and share their experiences.

Design Rationale

The Pushy Advisor consists of three main elements, a website, a forum, and a Facebook page. The inclusion of interesting and engaging content while building relationships with

members is at the forefront of each platform, because “people come for content and stay for community” (DiMauro, 2014). The website is designed to be a user-friendly introduction to the concept of proactive advising. It contains a brief explanation of the purpose of the community, links to the Forum and Facebook pages, and announcements of upcoming events, such as a monthly Twitter live chat hosted by the community. Currently, the website features some basic articles on proactive advising, but in the future, contributions will be solicited from experts in the field and from members. As the community grows, if an expanded Twitter presence is needed, or if members express an interest in using Instagram or Snapchat to communicate, those features can be added easily. An image of the website is attached in Appendix A.

Many communities use bulletin board/forum software as their primary platform. For purely esthetic reasons, a website was built as the gateway to The Pushy Advisor. The website is designed with a modified Z-pattern layout, using the graphics to guide the eye from the top to the bottom of the page (Mialki, 2018). The inclusion of colorful graphics adds a sense of playfulness to the website, as advisors struggle to push huge crates or to roll a boulder up a mountain.

Wix was chosen as the website building and hosting platform. Wix is free, easy to use, and has no limit on the number of pages a site can contain. The interface with the web editor is intuitive. A new website can be live in about one hour, and edits can be made quickly.

The Pushy Advisor Forums was built using the MyBB platform. MyBB is Free, and it was easy to find detailed videos of step-by-step instructions to set up a new forum. The interface itself is clean and functional. An image of the Forum can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to the forums that deal with “Proactive Advising” and “Push Technology,” the forum also includes a “Coffee House” section, to encourage members to use the platform for socializing and off-topic discussions (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). New members also have the

opportunity to introduce themselves in the “Welcome Wagon” area. It will be important to monitor these new member posts and respond promptly, so new members really feel welcome and be more likely to stay in the community (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). While these features may seem nonessential, Palloff (2015) advises that interactions among members leads to increased social presence in the community, which results in increased participation and satisfaction with the community.

One alternative platform that was considered was vBulletin, which is very popular with commercial installations. However, the initial cost of the installation is \$249 if you host the site yourself, and costs start at \$15 per month if vBulletin hosts the forum. (vBulletin, 2018).

Facebook was chosen as another element in the Pushy Advisor suite. According to the Pew Research Center, 68% of adults use Facebook. Moreover, three-quarters of those users access Facebook daily (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Facebook’s search function makes it easy to find The Pushy Advisor. The intent is to provide different but related content on the Facebook page, so a member who visits the page will have a reason to stay. Facebook is also an ideal platform to post events and other reminders. The Facebook page contains links to the website and to the forum. An image of the Facebook page can be found in Appendix C.

Other Learning Communities

There are many learning communities focusing on various aspects of advising under the NACADA umbrella. Typically, each learning community has a single webpage on the NACADA website. The content on these communities is generally a brief introduction to the mission of the community, and announcements of upcoming community events (NACADA, 2018).

Reflection

Each of the elements of The Pushy Advisor is designed to provide information and to be a place where members have a voice. The community is not just a place where an expert is conveying knowledge; each member is important in adding to the body of knowledge about proactive advising. As members progress from new participant to experienced members, they will be able to take on leadership roles by contributing content. Members are invited to share their views on the forum pages, and to write a short article to be featured on the website. It is critically important that members feel valued, and that their contribution means something (mackwebsolutions.com, n.d.). The guidelines for participation are clearly stated in each platform, to minimize the number of inappropriate interactions on The Pushy Advisor (Kraut & Resnick, 2012).

The number of tasks that are necessary to build the infrastructure for a new learning community is substantial. For each platform, there are numerous moving parts, and a change on any platform may necessitate a change on the others. In addition to the initial set-up work, there is a significant commitment to daily monitoring of the sites, and to constant generation of new content, to help the community thrive. It was truly a learning experience to create such a community from the ground up, and to realize how much effort is needed to maintain these communities. In the end, it is worth it if the community is successful in its goal of bringing advisors from various geographic areas together to share information and learn together.

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Appendix A

The Pushy Advisor Website - Bit.ly/pushyadvisor

Create Your WIX Site

THE PUSHY ADVISOR



Who We Are



Welcome to The Pushy Advisor, a community of advisors in higher education who practice proactive advising techniques such as using Push Technology. Join us and learn from experts in the field. Share your ideas and best practices on our [forum](#) too!

Live Twitter Chats

2nd Wednesday of the month, 8pm EST, join us for a live chat!

[Follow](#)

Visit Our Forum



Spotlight Story

Our spotlight stories will be hints and best practices from experts (and maybe even from you!). If you have something to share, please contact us through the [forum](#)!

In the meantime, here are some resources to get you started:

Steele, G., & Carter, A. [Managing Electronic Communication Technologies for More Effective Advising](#)

Pawelek, K. & Cantu, A. [Advising Plus Texting Equals Success](#)

Check out this video about how Valencia College uses Intrusive Advising techniques to help its students.



Contact Us

The Pushy Advisor
noreply@pushyadvisor.com

Socialize With Us

[f](#) [t](#)

Join Us

Sign up at The Pushy Advisor Forum
<http://pushyadvisor.x10host.com/>

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Appendix B

The Pushy Advisor Forum - <http://pushyadvisor.x10host.com/>

The screenshot shows the forum interface on an iPad. At the top, the browser address bar displays 'pushyadvisor.x10host.com'. Below the browser, the forum header includes the MyBB logo and navigation links: Portal, Search, Member List, Calendar, and Help. A user greeting 'Hello There, Guest!' is followed by 'Login' and 'Register' buttons. The main content area is titled 'The Pushy Advisor Forums' and contains several sections:

- Welcome Wagon:** A blue header with the text 'Welcome to our community!'. Below it is a table listing forum threads.

Forum	Threads	Posts	Last Post
About Our Forum Please read this information before you post!	1	1	Forum Guidelines 04-05-2018, 05:58 PM by pushyadv_Admin
Introductions Welcome to our community! Please take a moment to introduce yourself!	1	1	Hello and welcome! 04-05-2018, 05:48 PM by pushyadv_Admin
- Pushy Advisor Topics:** A blue header with a table listing forum threads.

Forum	Threads	Posts	Last Post
Push Technology This forum is concerned with using push technology to advise students.	0	0	Never
Intrusive Advising This forum is for sharing ideas for other ways to reach students by intrusive advising techniques.	0	0	Never
- Coffee House:** A blue header with the text 'This forum is for any discussion that is off-topic from Intrusive or Push Advising.' Below it is a table with columns for Forum, Threads, Posts, and Last Post.
- Board Statistics:** A blue header with the text 'Who's Online [Complete List]'. Below it, it states '1 user active in the past 15 minutes (0 members, 0 of whom are invisible, and 1 guest)'. Under 'Board Statistics', it says 'Our members have made a total of 2 posts in 2 threads. We currently have 1 members registered. Please welcome our newest member, **pushyadv_Admin**. The most users online at one time was 4 on 04-04-2018 at 02:19 AM'. At the bottom right of this section is 'Forum Team | Forum Statistics'.

At the bottom of the page, there are icons for forum status: Forum Contains New Posts, Forum Contains No New Posts, Forum is Locked, and Redirect Forum. The footer includes 'Contact Us', 'The Pushy Advisor', 'Return to Top', 'Lite (Archive) Mode', 'Mark All Forums Read', 'RSS Syndication', 'Powered By MyBB, © 2002-2018 MyBB Group.', and 'Current time: 04-07-2018, 03:10 PM'.


Appendix C

The Pushy Advisor Facebook Page - www.facebook.com/Pushy-Advisor




Pushy Advisor
Education

Send Message

 **Pushy Advisor** April 3 at 10:18pm · 🌐


Welcome to The Pushy Advisor, a community of college advisors who are interested in a proactive approach, including using push technology to reach undergraduate students.

Please contribute your ideas to this page! A few guidelines for posts:
All posts must be directly related to advising undergraduate students.
... [See More](#)




The Pushy Advisor Forums

PUSHYADVISOR.X10HOST.COM

 **Pushy Advisor** Thursday at 9:56 PM · 🌐

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLKUM8sl0Dw>



Advising Theories and Fundamentals: Proactive (Int)
This is a brief introduction to Proactive Advising - created at <http://goanimate4schools.com/>. Based on: Williams, S. (2007). From Theory to Practice: The App...
YOUTUBE.COM

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