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Hope Foley
Portland State University

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Building and Expanding Avestor's Social Media Presence: A Capstone Review

by

Hope Foley

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

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Thesis Advisor

Brenda Glascott

Portland State University

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Avestor is a Portland, Oregon based real estate investment company. Their innovative design combines customization, transparency, and usability to create software that is unique and unprecedented in their industry. They work with sponsors to provide a wide variety of investment opportunities to their investors. These sponsors find deals which are then split into “slices” for multiple investors to buy a share. By doing this, investors can put their money into multiple real estate deals to create a diversified investment portfolio.

While Avestor’s software and program are unparalleled, they needed assistance attracting customers, specifically sponsors. They enlisted help from Portland State University students as a part of their capstone work to build and expand the company’s social media presence with the goal of increasing their reach and attracting new sponsors. My group consisted of seven members with various concentrations in the business program: two of us were Management and Leadership concentrations, three were Accounting, one Finance, and one Marketing and Advertising. We assigned roles within the project that aligned with our concentrations and were tasked with researching, communicating frequently with the client, creating multiple visuals to express our research and ideas, presenting our findings to the whole Avestor team three times throughout the term, and finally writing a final cumulative report combining our research, visuals, and recommendations.

In order to reach the company’s goals, our team analyzed the company’s internal and external forces to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and possible opportunities and threats. We researched data and statistics for various strategies such as commercial social media platforms, alternative social media platforms such as Slack, and industry podcasts and conferences. Using this research, we then proposed possible paths for Avestor to follow and the outcomes, benefits, and consequences of each, determining which would be most beneficial for

the company to achieve their goals. Finally, we proposed our final recommendation and implementation method that we believed will be most promising and successful, based on the data we gathered.

Throughout this project, we used a variety of frameworks to analyze the company and proposed solutions that I have studied over the course of my business education.

One such framework was the SWOT analysis. This is a common technique used by most businesses that helps to analyze a company internally. A SWOT analysis provides a space to recognize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an organization as they are situated in their industry. In this project, we used a SWOT analysis to analyze the company internally in order to gain a better understanding of Avestor as a whole to provide the best recommendations that will align with their company and be the most helpful.

Our team also used the PESTEL and Porter's 5 Forces framework to provide an external analysis of Avestor. These frameworks analyze the forces outside the organization that might have an effect on the company. The PESTEL framework looks at the political, economic, sociocultural, technological, environmental, and legal aspects affecting a company. Porter's 5 Forces includes the rivalry among competition, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, threat of new companies entering the industry, and threat of substitute products and services.

After analyzing our company as a whole, we began researching and forming recommendations for our specific project. We provided Avestor with three alternative paths forward that would allow them to build their social media presence. To evaluate these alternatives, we used a common business tool called a decision matrix. This tool scores alternatives or solutions against criteria that have been given weights. The alternatives are given

rankings based on how well they consider or implement the criteria. The rankings are multiplied by the weights to provide scores, which are then added together to a total score. In this case, we had three total scores—one for each alternative. The alternative with the highest score is the best option for the company.

During this project, each of our team members had a specific role that we performed for the duration of the term. We chose roles that mirrored our educational concentrations to ensure our success in those roles and provide a strong foundation for the team. My role was a co-project coordinator, as I was one of the two members that was earning a Management and Leadership degree. I was the main contact between the client and our team, as well as the one that oversaw all parts of the project, creating documents, ensuring all parts were completed effectively, and submitting finished documents to the client and instructor. This role allowed me to apply what I have learned about how to be a successful leader and better understand my leadership style. There are various recognized styles of leadership and it is believed that every person adopts one of them, or possibly a combination of a few, when they lead a group. One such style is democratic, or participative leadership, which involves making space for other members in the group, allowing them to participate in decisions, and respecting their opinions. I believe I have a democratic style of leadership as I value the opinions of others and want them to be included in the decision making process, even if I ultimately make the final decision. This lended well in the situation of this project as there were many moving parts, all equally important, and our success heavily depended on all of us working together.

I was also able to practice effective communication with business clients as I emailed our client weekly progress reports and any additional information or questions we had, as well as facilitated our weekly video meetings with the client. My emails to the client needed to be

professional and concise, yet include all of the necessary information of shared documents and visuals, questions our team had, Zoom meeting links and times, and updates on work that has been completed and the next steps we plan to take. Our relationship with the client evolved over the course of the project as we became more comfortable, though it always remained professional. Our weekly video meetings usually consisted of new questions that arose as we continued our research and discussions, or any feedback the client wanted to provide us as we took our next steps. As a project coordinator, I facilitated these meetings by welcoming the client, asking questions our team had previously discussed, and allowing the other members to ask any other questions or comments that arose.

One of our main challenge was working with an innovative company that did not have any direct competitors. This made it difficult to analyze the company and research best strategies for social media. We could not look at how competitors approached social media and used it to their advantage, and then attempt to apply that to Avestor. Because of this, we had to use traditional investment companies and real estate companies, combined with Avestor's current strategies to present new recommendations.

Our team also had difficulty with how little direction there was for assignments given by the professor. We had a strict schedule that included assignments we needed to complete such as multiple visuals, drafts for reports or plans, and presentations. Because the four groups in the class are working on different projects with different requirements, the assignments could not be as direct as we would have liked. We had general, overarching directions for assignments, but not nearly as much detail as we're used to. While it was unpleasant and frustrating, I have come to realize that this likely mirrors true experiences in the business world. I have little real-world

experience in the industry and I believe this was a valuable aspect of this course. It was a difficult learning curve for us, but we eventually found our footing.

Throughout my business education, there were many classes that I directly applied in this class and project. As far as working in a team, my Team Processes class helped immensely. It taught me best practices for working in a team, particularly the importance of communication and the value in ideas from all members. Personally, my Contemporary Leadership Issues class helped me perform well in my role as a co-project coordinator. This class encouraged me to analyze and understand myself as a leader and provided me with the tools to know how best to lead. As I was the one that was mainly communicating with the client, I used skills I learned in my Business Communication class. This class taught me best practices for writing business emails and memos in a professional and understandable manner.

For the research, assignments, and content of the project, I specifically used what I learned in my Research and Analysis of Business Problems; Marketing Management; and Digital Media Analytics classes. Research and Analysis of Business Problems taught me how to use a SWOT analysis and decision matrix, and how important these can be in understanding business decisions. As we were working with Avestor's social media marketing, Marketing Management and Digital Media Analytics provided me with a basic understanding of business marketing which allowed me to help my team form and present recommendations that would be thoughtful and useful to the company.

Overall, the business capstone was an immensely helpful class to end my degree. It was intense and required a lot of hardwork to complete the numerous components, but it was worth it in the end. I was able to combine the various skills I've learned throughout my education and

apply them directly to a real-world situation with a real business client. It has provided me with new confidence and has shown me how comfortable I feel naturally applying those skills.