

Alumni Spotlights: Mike Dockum

Q1. I'd love to learn more about your career. What have been some of your greatest accomplishments and challenges as a professional in the field of communications? What are your responsibilities in your current position?

I'm employed as the Senior Strategist for a marketing agency. Basically, I get paid to take on the perspective of a target audience, then create message strategies and marketing plans designed to compel them to do what we want. The biggest challenge is convincing my clients to release their raptor-like grasp on what matters to them long enough to embrace what matters to their constituents. You'd be surprised how difficult this can be. The greatest accomplishments come from collaborating with a hilarious creative team and developing marketing that produces measurable results. Mostly so I can whisper the sweetest "I told you so" to the aforementioned client.

Q2. What aspects of your education as a communication student have been most beneficial to your career?

My first love was interpersonal communication theory. I remember taking SPCOM 102 and feeling like I was studying things I'd known my whole life. Over time, I became enthralled with persuasion theory. In my daily life, I use that education constantly. I can't think of a single day when I didn't employ communication skills to improve strategic relationships or sway someone's attitude or behavior. Except that time I vanished from my life for 3 days to marathon Game of Thrones prior to the Season 5 premiere. No regrets.

Q3. What advice would you give to current communication students about the professional realm?

Identify a job that combines what you're good with what you're passionate about. It took me WAY too long to figure out that this is the recipe for professional fulfillment. Here's three steps to get you started: 1) Read the book "What Color is Your Parachute" and do the exercises. I guarantee it'll be the best money you'll spend at the Illini Union Bookstore. 2) Request informational interviews with professionals to learn the pro's and con's of every job that combines your skills and field of passion. 3) Do job shadows for the 3-5 jobs that seem most interesting to you. If only I'd followed that same advice earlier in my career, I might have saved myself 4 hard years toiling for the man!

