

Social Media: Making It Work for Nonprofits

Social media technologies have taken the world by storm. Tweets and walls, links and blogs connect long lost friends, celebrities to their fans, and organizations to their stakeholders.



Read the news, watch TV, and you'll see how social media mobilizes the community daily around social issues. Actor Hugh Jackman pledged to donate \$100,000 dollars to a charity promoted by 140 word "tweet" using Twitter. Mock-talk Show host Steven Colbert directs his "Nation" to donorschoose.org to support classroom projects of children with parents in the military. The Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) or LIVESTRONG promotes cancer awareness and prevention along with events like triathlons and cancer summits through Facebook.

Fundraising through social media, however, has been less than desirable in terms of actually dollars raised. *Less than 1 percent of those who have joined a Facebook nonprofit page have actually donated.* Yet brand awareness can be built faster and with a greater reach than ever before.

While these technologies have great appeal many nonprofit professionals have legitimate questions about their use in specific contexts. Which tools make the most sense for the nonprofit sector? How can organizations use these tools to build relationships and invite investment? Is the impact of these technologies worth the investment of time and energy?

As always, an organization's culture and current stakeholders should be considered before launching any type of marketing campaign, and the careful creation of a brand can be easily undone by careless communications. Before jumping on the bandwagon, make sure you consider how social media technologies support your strategic efforts to fulfill your mission in the community.

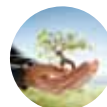
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"Satisfying" Websites
Increase Donations



Using Volunteers and
Pro Bono Professionals



Building a Foundation
for Social Change

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(continued)

The pros:

- Supporters and their friends can be easily reached on a daily basis.
- Social media marketing is cost-efficient in comparison with other marketing methods
- Messages can easily bounce around between interested parties, as friends and colleagues forward your messaging to other potential supporters.
- Relationships with supporters can be fostered through information sharing and open communication.
- Inviting public comment about your programs and services can teach you more about your target audience.

The cons:

- Social media marketing efforts are not likely to attract large audiences overnight. Social media marketing takes time, and not all agencies have dedicated personnel to fulfill to create and maintain content and respond to users.
- Content must be engaging, original and interesting to a variety of readers. Without relevance, efforts can be wasted.
- You lose some control of your marketing efforts. Anything you publish is up for grabs, and others can easily criticize you.

With that said, the cost-effectiveness of social media technologies makes “testing” these strategies a relatively low-risk activity. The list below offers a brief overview of some of the current popular tools.

Twitter



Currently the most talked about social networking tool. Users submit updates using 140 characters or less. Those interested in your agency can choose to follow you on Twitter and receive updates when you submit a “tweet,” a fast and easy way to keep your supporters updated daily.

Facebook



A social networking website. Various types of profiles can be created on this website including a profile page for your agency, a fan page, event invites, etc. Supporters of your agency can become a friend or a fan to the agency. Friend profiles tend to be more active whereas fan profiles tend to be more passive.

LinkedIn



While typically used as a personal online resume, creating a “linked in” page for your organization or executive leadership allows you to join groups or associations that align with your mission. Participants can send updates to links promoting job opportunities or the progress of a new venture.

RSS Feed



This icon is found on blogs and articles that are updated regularly. A supporter of your organization may subscribe to your blog by clicking this icon to receive automatic updates from your agency. This can include events, volunteer opportunities, and articles that pertain to your mission.

Tumblr



An easy to use website that makes blogging simple. A user friendly interface helps you post text, photos, quotes, links, music and videos.

YouTube



Content of this website is generated by videos uploaded by users. To upload a video you must create a free profile and this profile can be customized and advertised to the public. PSA's, video contests and interviews are the most commonly submitted videos for nonprofits.

“SATISFYING” WEBSITES INCREASE DONATIONS

A recent study conducted by ForeSee Results¹ found that visitors to nonprofit websites were more likely to donate money, volunteer time, and recommend the nonprofit to others if they liked and were satisfied with the website. The study utilized the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) to gauge satisfaction of over 2,000 respondents who visited nonprofit websites.

The study showed that visitor priorities began with site functionality, with image, content, security and resource allocation factoring into satisfaction as well. The basic tips that follow can help make visiting your website a more satisfying experience.

Functionality

Be sure there are no error messages. Test your website for compatibility across all web browsers (they're not all made the same). Provide security for online donations. Avoid pages that scroll endlessly.

Brand Consistency

Be consistent with your use of images, logo, color and language. Make sure your imagery complements your content and mission.

Content and Images

Content should avoid jargon and offer a clear understanding of your agency to the new visitor. Images should be high resolution, clear and coordinate with the overall theme. Where possible identify community members and participants in photos

Current Events

Keep visitors up to date with a news and events page. Update facts quarterly and highlight news that pertains to the mission of your agency such as new legislation. Blogs and other types of interactive messaging can bring repeat visitors.

Study Highlights:

49% of “highly satisfied” website visitors are likely to donate money

38% of “highly satisfied” website visitors are likely to volunteer.

Satisfied web visitors are 66% more likely to use the website instead of a costlier channel as the primary resource.

Nearly one-third of donors surveyed chose not to give online because the website functionality was poor.

¹ A customer satisfaction measurement company based in Michigan.

A LOAN RESOURCE TO CONSIDER

Whether you are a public benefit or a for profit corporation, you may have noticed how hard it is now to get a new bank loan or line of credit, regardless of your credit history or tenure as a client. For some organizations, finding private loans to get through the cash crunch has become their only option.

It is a good option, especially for investors wary of placing their cash in the market. But before you make the leap to ask supporters, board members and other stakeholders for loans, make sure you know how to manage the process, legally and efficiently.

One resource, Virgin Money, offers small business loan management support at reasonable prices, and a wealth of information on their website about business and private loans, as well as a free guide. Your accountant may be another resource to help guide you on standards for repayment, and establishing security for both parties.

Visit www.virginmoneyus.com for more information on managing business loans.

Note: While private loans can provide investors more interest than current treasurer rates, they must apply the minimum applicable federal rates (AFR) to qualify as a business loan. Resource: IRS, <http://www.irs.gov/app/picklist/list/federalRates.html>



Using Volunteers and Pro Bono Professionals

Volunteerism is on the rise. The trend is supported in part by unfortunate circumstances, as many Americans who have been laid off are offering pro bono work to keep professionally vibrant and to maintain normalcy in their lives. Other volunteers are simply more aware of community need during these challenging times.

Your organization can benefit from volunteers to maintain and even grow organizational capacity as funding shifts and retracts. To effectively utilize professional volunteers, however, you must be prepared to use them well.

1. Survey staff regularly to see where volunteers or pro bono support can be used, both in group or individual projects
2. One person projects should be thoughtfully planned to keep the professional volunteer busy and never feeling underutilized.
3. One staff member should be assigned as the key contact for the volunteer and the liaison between the volunteer and other staff members.
4. Ask for a specific time frame volunteers can commit to, stick to it, and plan accordingly
5. Ask students if they will need a supervisor to sign off on volunteer hours.
6. Make staff aware when volunteers will be present.
7. Request feedback from your volunteers to keep them engaged, invested and well-utilized.

United We Serve, Serve.gov

Visit the website above to learn more about the White House campaign to get Americans in action and into communities.

CaliforniaVolunteers.org

CaliforniaVolunteers is the state office that manages programs and initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Californians engaged in service and volunteering.

If resources are sparse, and your staff is stretched so thin that even the prospect of free labor elicits groans, bring in volunteers at your own pace. One or two well-used and skilled volunteers may be more effective than an army of well-intentioned supporters.

Volunteers can become fierce advocates for your mission in the communities. Whether they are on the front lines, in the back office or developing your staff, they are bringing services you need to reach your goals.

Agency in Action

In May 2008, a group of educators formed The Orange County Deaf Literacy Project (OCDLP) to promote literacy among Deaf and hard of hearing students in Orange County. OCDLP programs provide resources and education through the volunteer involvement of both Deaf and hearing instructors, in an attempt to better reach both Deaf and hearing parents, and to help to foster more effective communication between educators, children and parents.

In its first year, the Project developed a strong plan of action, launched its programs, and leveraged resources through the use of a local fiscal sponsor. Fiscal sponsorship has allowed OCDLP to keep overhead down while the Project tests local interest in the issue of deaf literacy and focuses on direct services. On the fundraising side, OCDLP was fortunate enough to receive funding from both the Target Foundation and Dad's House Foundation Fund, a huge achievement as the Project had no funding history. Soon after securing grant funding, local community members with a passion for their mission began donating.

Many nonprofits in their first year struggle to define goals and outcomes and fundraise for new program efforts. Today, it is harder still as donors continue to reevaluate their giving. By developing a clear plan of action and demonstrating the ability to leverage resources as done successfully by OCDLP, a small agency can attract funders for new initiatives even in these challenging times.



The Orange County
Deaf Literacy Project

OCDLP directly serves children grades K-12 through the following programs:
Home Based Literacy • Reading Counts • Book Poster Contest -
ASL Storytelling Hour- each Saturday at Katie Wheeler Library

For further information and how to become involved with OCDLP please contact Program Manager Laurie Drago at ldrago@iusd.org

GRANT DEADLINES

October 7, 2009
Picturing America School
Collaboration Projects
Arts

October 31, 2009
CVS Caremark Community Grants Program
Children with Disabilities

October 31, 2009
The Lawrence Foundation
Human Services

November 1, 2009
Assets for Independence
Low-income individuals and families

November 1, 2009
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's National
Projects Fund
Performing Arts



*Building a Foundation
for Social Change*

Our vision is to promote effective business strategies and collaboration among organizations seeking social change. Our services include:

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