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501(c)Social Video Series:

Social Media Best Practices for Nonprofits in the Digital Age

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by

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2012

501(c)Social Video Series:

Social Media Best Practices for Nonprofits in the Digital Age

by

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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This video series and report act as an educational tool to help small to mid-sized nonprofits use social media in the most beneficial way for their organization, by offering advice and tactics based on actual stories from nonprofits in Austin, Texas. As the landscape of marketing and media changes, nonprofits must be willing to utilize social media for their development strategies, event planning, volunteer recruitment and engagement, and have an up to date social media policy. Six nonprofit organizations tell their success stories and discuss the importance of integrating social media into their marketing strategies and campaigns.

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Introduction

Most social media tools are free, but the time to manage them isn't. Nonprofits, large and small, are well aware of this cost and cite it as a major roadblock to using social media. Another obstacle: Nonprofits have been preconditioned to view technology as expensive and difficult. These descriptions were accurate at one time but not now. Low-cost resources abound to help – and the people you want to reach expect nonprofits, like for-profits, to make social media a cornerstone of their outreach efforts.

It's the 21st century. People passionate about a cause and eager to bring about social change connect through social media. It is imperative that nonprofits learn how to become visible in social media by using the right medium for the task at hand. In the last five years, the adoption of social media applications has exploded among diverse communities of Internet users (Ostrow 2010). Social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, RSS, and wikis (Hansen et al., 2011; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) are now a part of most Internet users' day to day communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) and a large number of organizations (e.g., public and academic libraries) have joined these online communities to stay connected to the public and members. These services can be powerful tools for information distribution, sharing, and creation and have an important role to play in the future of knowledge management (KM) theory and practice. Successful KM projects need to carefully consider the needs and activities of their users (Shaw & Edwards, 2005) and implement tools that take advantage of the power of social media. One organizational context where traditionally corporate information management practices such as KM are being adopted is in the non-profit sector where organizations often work with high levels of knowledge capital and large groups of employees and volunteers.

Methodology

A three-part method was used in this project: First, I conducted an extensive search of the literature on digital and social media used by nonprofit organizations. Second, I created the concept for the video series, storyboarded the episodes, then produced and edited the content, ultimately creating four episodes of *501(c)Social*. Finally, I fused the social media theory with the video content to create a report that summarized the interviews and footage in the webseries.

Qualitative research methods were used extensively. Qualitative or interpretive research includes many forms: observation, participation, interviews, and ethnography. Qualitative research is also sometimes called theory, analysis, ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 1). Corbin and Strauss (2008) define methodology as “a way of thinking about and studying social reality” (p. 1).

More research methods implemented during this project will yield more accurate and useful results. This idea relates to the theory of triangulation. Triangulation, as defined by Denzin (1978), is “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” but can also refer to the process of using multiple forms of research within a specific research method (as cited in Jick, 1979, p.602). Jick points out various benefits of using the triangulation theory in research practices. “Triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new or deeper dimensions to emerge” (Jick, 1979, p.603).

Staying current with technology trends and each new social media platform presents new, overwhelming challenges for the staff and board members, especially for smaller nonprofits. In an effort to help nonprofits keep up with current media trends and implementation, I have created a video series titled *501(c)Social* that highlights social media best practices for small to mid-sized nonprofits.

The series involves four episodes each outlining a major area of a nonprofit's online presence. The episodes are: Social Media for Development and Donor Engagement, Social Media for Event Planning, Social Media for Volunteer Recruitment and Engagement, and Social Media Policy Building. Shot and edited documentary style, the episodes feature interviews with Marketing/Communications representatives from six mid-sized nonprofits in the Austin area and footage of their social media sites and actual events. The project aims to show the importance of social media best practices and creating a social media strategy individual to your organization.

The series will be posted on the 501(c)ommunity site, hosted and facilitated by Greenlights for Nonprofit Success for nonprofits in the Austin area to view as educational content. Greenlights is an Austin based nonprofit consulting organization that offers management, merger, financial, marketing, and administrative consulting services to local nonprofits. Greenlights hosts an online resource library, filled with blogs and journals on topics relevant to nonprofit consulting. Most recently, Greenlights launched a members-only 501(c)ommunity site where nonprofits can interact through file sharing, discussion forums, and socially connect with one another in general. The *501(c)Social* series will be online exclusive content for members to watch and learn from.

Literature Review

Social Media's Cultural Influence

Arguably, four books have been especially influential and are often quoted in professional and academic circles in this context: Tapscott and Williams' Wikinomics, Jenkins's Convergence Culture, Li and Bernoff's Groundswell, and Qualman's Socialnomics. Tapscott and Williams (2006) consider social networks as a part of a wider trend in communication landscapes. They characterize it as "mass collaboration".

In their opinion, transparency, peer collaboration, audience participation and globalization are changing markets and companies and social networks like YouTube or MySpace are crucial. A new type of market is being shaped: copyright, communication strategy and message control by hierarchical management structures is increasingly under attack. Wikipedia is described as symbol of this process that is influencing the communication of brands, fashion, markets, ideas and ideology.

Jenkins (2006) describes three concepts that shape what he calls "convergence culture": media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence (Jenkins, 2006: 2). By media convergence, Jenkins deals with the content flow between multiple content platforms and audience's migrating behaviour: people are fundamentally looking for entertainment experiences. With the term "participatory culture", he underlines the contrast with the idea of a passive viewer in a time when producers and consumers do not show clearly different roles but interact with rules we don't seem to understand fully yet. By collective intelligence, he elaborates on a trend to turn con-sumption into a collective process, sharing our knowledge to cope with the sheer volume of available information. Social media develop in this unique convergence, participation and “crowdsourcing” environment.

Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff (2008), two Forrester Research3 analysts, showed through 25 real world cases how companies increase their market knowledge, generate income, save money and mobilize their employees using “social technologies”. Such firms follow a “groundswell” model, similar to a wave that sweeps markets. Li and Bernoff consider that there is definite social trend towards people using technologies to get what they need from other people, instead of relying in traditional institutions like companies. The consequences are almost revolutionary: control is weakened and reduced, when control has been the foundation of communication strategies for businesses and institutions. Li and Bernoff stress the need to understand how new relationships are created in social media: technologies have changed but the impact in personal relationships is even more profound.

Erik Qualman (2009) deals with social media in his book “Socialnomics”. He describes an age of instant communication, transparency (we live in what he terms “glass-house effect”), narcissism and participation. It is a landscape where authenticity is a currency of exchange and mass communications do not work, as audiences go back to trust in close persons and traditional media decline. He also explores Obama’s rise to power and explores future implications with expressions like “what happens in Vegas stays in YouTube” or “we will no longer look for the news, the news will find us”.

Qualman looks at the social media phenomenon and assesses its impact on interpersonal relationships. His book shows how strategy, marketing and markets are influenced and explores how some brands feel very comfortable in such a context. In his opinion, social media are more revolution than ephemeral fashion.

Social Media and the Nonprofit Sector

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." This is a general definition and pertains to a broad range of digital tools (e.g., social networking, blogs, wikis, social tagging, and 1bookmarking, etc.) (Hansen et al., 2011) but the key shared factor is that users are able to interact with digital tools and content and may author their own responses and opinions.

NPOs tend to exhibit a highly heterogeneous mix of organizational structures but they do have some basic commonalities including a level of formal organization (e.g., a registered tax number), separation from governments, a non-profit and self-governing structure, and some degree of voluntary participation (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). NPOs compete in resources (Gregory and Rathi, 2008) placing a greater emphasis on effective knowledge dissemination with information ideally flowing inexorably outwards into broader social contexts and reaching wider audiences. Effective NPOs must manage their knowledge in a meaningful way (Lemieux and Dalkir, 2006) for effective sharing of information with the general public for the benefit of the society. The power of social media can be a game changer within this community.

The opportunities for building online and real world social networks, heightens the appeal of social media for NPOs. While some online social networks strive to represent real-world social groups, others have formed as tools for connecting people with similar interests who may never have met in real life (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Reaching a broad audience with relevant information and providing a way to interact with volunteers directly in a cyclical knowledge sharing and formalizing environment has been an elusive goal for this group. Both international and local (large and small) NPOs aim to harness the social networking aspect of social media because it allows for direct contact with individuals interested in getting involved on-line, off-line, or both, with the organization's activities. Social media provide NPOs with an opportunity to create a dynamic online presence and potentially increase their brand awareness with limited resources while still remaining connected to members, volunteers, and the public on a personal level (Rowley, 2010). Opening up easy lines of communication with the public and engaging one on one with individual followers affords the kind of true grassroots community building that is so highly sought after in this sector.

Social media and non-profit expert Beth Kanter argues that we do not yet have an adequate collection of non-profit case studies that share real-world social media strategies' success stories and cautionary tales (2008, Jan 13). Little is known about how NPOs can use social media successfully to further their goals beyond anecdotal information, successful projects are difficult to measure, and there are very few useful metrics to measure public engagement and knowledge transfer. Michael Wu argues that "fan count is only the most superficial characterization of engagement, because it says nothing about the fans' subsequent action and their interactions" (as cited in Askanase, 2011). Getting at this kind of information is very difficult.

Some organizations use social media heavily to deliver programs, engage supporters and advocate for the cause, but some are a more ambivalent. David Neff and Randal Moss, the two co-authors of *The Future of Nonprofits: Innovate and Thrive in the Digital Age* are very active members of the first group. Both have won awards for their digital strategy work with nonprofits and as consultants. Neff was named one of the top “Social Media People” in Texas in 2009. Moss has testified before the U.S. Congress on digital media marketing. Like many of today’s current thinkers on the subject of social media and social change, the two begin their book boldly by making the case that for today’s nonprofits, coming to terms with the uncertainties of Web 2.0 is not just helpful, it’s imperative to their survival. (Even within the genre, the title of the first chapter, “Innovate or Die,” is a keeper.) Fortunately for readers, *The Future of Nonprofits* proves to be a truly useful guide to help nonprofit organizations do exactly this.

The watchword in *The Future of Nonprofits* is “innovation.” According to Neff and Moss, innovation responding to social trends has driven every major change in the nonprofit industry, and will continue to do so. One of the most compelling examples they give of this is the shift from geographically-based fundraising to workplace-based fundraising as a result of women joining the workforce in the 1970s. This is a big reason, they say, that fundraising is now driven in a big part by peer-to-peer social networking. More people who care about issues have daily access to technologies that help them connect to others who share their passion. Neff and Moss stress that we must not only come up with new ideas, but also think of new ways to execute them. Essentially, they say, we’re now living in a climate of constant change, so organizations must cultivate a “culture of innovation.”

Neff and Moss provide multiple industry examples of how different businesses have used social media to increase their impact. Staff members at Comcast, for example, followed a Twitter user who complained about their customer service, and quickly tweeted back to help the user with his problem. Now Comcast solves all its customer service problems online.

The nonprofit Charity Water raised $250,000 in one day by inviting its Twitter followers to a conference. This funding allowed them to increase their visibility exponentially. Now any visitor of Hulu.com has seen Charity Water's frequent advertisements that stream during your favorite episodes of "30 Rock" and "The Daily Show." These colorful testimonials are sprinkled throughout the entire book, and entice readers even further, likening social media to a steaming plate of cookies just waiting to be eaten.

For all its talk of future casting and flexibility, the name of the game in *The Future of Nonprofits* seems to be "social media or bust." Despite the authors' earnest testimonial to Web 2.0, no one can deny that technology and innovation are interrelated. It's a chicken-or-the-egg kind of situation: Technology is driving innovation, but innovation is also driving technology. However, many nonprofits still remain social-networking-phobic. It is important to recognize that even though the jargon may seem confusing, the goals are the same. The three pillars of the book's strategy are familiar to anyone who has ever tried to run an organization, being aware of other organizations, structuring for the future, hiring inspired people with lots of new ideas, and social media can help achieve these goals more quickly and effectively.

Neff and Moss share tips about how using social media can more effectively advance your organization's goals in the digital age. The big piece of advice centers on 'Awareness'. It has always been important to remain aware of what's going on in similar organizations to remain competitive in the marketplace. Just a few years ago you might have received a deluge of paper newsletters in your mailbox that piled up on your kitchen table. Today, it's up to you to subscribe to blogs and follow like-minded organizations on Twitter.It's not just about gauging the competition. Where reading a monthly mailing is a passive act, social media can help you participate, learn and confer with your surrounding market. “Like” things. Leave comments. Part of awareness is making other organizations aware of you.

Neff and Moss surely make a convincing case for the use of technology in today’s nonprofit business climate. The comic strip in the back of the book that summarizes its entire contents is a cute if somewhat gimmicky way to spread their message in yet another media format.

Findings from Interviews in *501(c)Social*

Social Media for Donor Engagement and Development

Use Social Media as a First Step to Engage with Donors

(David Neff, Lights, Camera, Help!)

David Neff, author of *The Future of Nonprofits* and interviewee in *501(c)Social* states that:

> Social media is going to serve as that place for folks to go out and cultivate new relationships they wouldn't have before. A lot of times social media is going to serve as the perfect first touch with donors, so maybe they hit the "like" on your Facebook page, follow you on Twitter and add you on Google + and they're casually paying attention. And hopefully the first thing isn't an ask, but it's to provide value to them through what you're doing through your nonprofit.

The point is that social media can be used to tap into so many basic human emotions that initially catch anyone's eye (and especially a donor's), such as being connected with others, being heard and understood, and being recognized for generosity.

Part of engaging with donors is being a good listener initially. When you find out what they want by listening and considering their values, you can make your site and organization as a whole better equipped to attract them. Social media is not a venue set up for you to just ask for money outright, nor is it a venue where you should rely on funds to naturally start coming through. Social media is completely about setting the stage and creating an image for your organization that can be easily accessed by constituents.

Create catchy and universal campaign hashtags (#'s) to follow

(Susan Leibrock, Sustainable Food Center)

This may come off as a tutorial on Twitter, but nonprofit development campaigns have the highest likelihood of doing well on that particular platform, so creating an easy to follow, unique hashtag (#) for it is essential. The concept itself is deceptively simple; just add the "#" symbol in front of a word or a group of words with the spaces between them taken out. This tiny bit of detail lets Twitter organically categorize a nonprofit's tweets, as well as anyone else's, that make use of the exact same hashtag. In a very big way, it is the 140-character equivalent of assigning keyword tags to documents and blog posts.

Just as anyone searching for content about a specific keyword gets pointed toward the articles containing that keyword, anyone searching on a hashtag gets a listing of tweets containing that hashtag. Therein lies the power of the humble hashtag.By including a relevant hashtag in your organization's tweet, it becomes visible to people searching for that specific topic, adding specific voice to the general discussion. Conversely, hashtags automatically narrow down an organization's audience, allowing the tweets to reach and engage only those interested in the same subject matter.

The probability of one's tweets being retweeted are also higher when one uses the right hashtag to share your comments or insights about a subject. People have a natural desire to share these useful insights. Ultimately, an organization could gain new followers, not because of the hashtags per se, but because the ideas and messages will reach those interested in them in the first place. Given such a powerful tool for initiating conversation and soliciting engagement, the natural next step is to use these hashtags to market products and services using the Twitter platform. It makes good sense; Twitter is awash with stories of how companies have successfully carried out their marketing campaigns using Twitter hashtags.

In the U.K., Domino's Pizza slashed a penny off the price of its featured flavor each time someone tweeted with the hashtag #letsdolunch within a specified time frame. The campaign generated 85,000 tweets and a host of happy diners who were able to enjoy the pizza at a huge discount. Radio Shack asked people to tweet #kindofabigdeal and earned more than 80,000 mentions. Even the Obama administration scored a victory over the Republicans on the payroll tax debate. The administration invited people to tweet about what #40dollars means to them. The system's utter simplicity makes it easy to get your hashtag campaign started. Here are some tips on how to get started.

Susan Leibrock from The Sustainable Food Center in Austin adds some more tips beyond her initial quote (Leibrock):

1. Determine the kind of value you aim to derive for yourself and your followers from using the hashtag. Do you intend to crowdsource information? Do you aim to create buzz? Are you looking to provoke conversation? Make sure your intentions and purpose for employing the hashtag are clear and focused. Formulate a hashtag that is relevant to your purpose and the subject you intend to tweet about.

2. Check to see if the hashtag you have in mind already exists and is in use. It is also very important to check if your desired hashtag has not taken on some other meaning. Twitter Search, Hashtags.org and Tagalus are some tools you can use to do a quick hashtag check.

3. Start tweeting your hashtag. It helps to set the context of your hashtag by briefly explaining what it means. Tweet with moderation. The last thing you want is to be seen as a spammer. Always ask what value you and your followers can get from the tweet you are putting out.

4. If it does not exist yet, add your hashtag definition to online tools such as Tagalus.

5. Set up an automatic alert tool that sends you an email alert when someone tweets your hashtag. Twilert is one such tool.

As you can see, the process is simple, but it is not without its pitfalls. To spare yourself from Twitter hijacking, you will need to plan your Twitter campaign to the smallest detail. But since it is more difficult to foretell how anything will end up, one could join in on existing hashtag trends, instead of creating a new one. If the conversation is already on-going and established, there is less of a chance that it will get hijacked. And be human. People warm up more to other people rather than faceless corporations.

“Be brave and take risks” to stand out in social media

(Susan Leibrock, Sustainable Food Center)

With so many companies trying to utilize the same platforms, it is essential to stand out from your competitors with something that can catch the eye of your audience. In 501(c)Social, Susan Leibrock discusses the importance of taking risks in your marketing. Tapping into important taboo subject matter, as the Sustainable Food Center did with their campaign against childhood obesity, energizes and engages audiences. Childhood obesity is not often visually represented in marketing, though it is an issue that SFC, and many other mid-sized NPO’s are trying to solve. Why not create a visually compelling campaign that shows exactly what the issue is?

Nontraditional marketing requires thinking outside the box. Simply put, yesterday's marketing tactics just don't work like they used to. This is a universal problem and all marketers are facing related challenges. There are many different phenomena to blame this on, from consumers' attention shifting to online media, to a general cultural numbness to marketing due to an over saturation of marketing messages. Whatever reason you choose to accept, the result is undeniable for financial marketers, last year's marketing plan isn't going to cut it this year.

Some marketers will continue to try the same tactics, expecting different results. They think recent years with less marketing success are just flukes. Others will stop denying the changing marketing climate; in fact they will embrace it. And they will embrace it by integrating non-traditional marketing tactics into their marketing arsenal. Non-traditional marketing is becoming increasingly important and valuable to marketers struggling to regain marketing momentum they may have lost in recent years. It reverses decades of stereotypically one-dimensional, non-fun, non-human experience. Tactics that are surprising, attention-grabbing and memorable go a long way. Today's customer doesn't want to feel like they just got sold something. They are much too smart and have limited time so an advertisement and/or additional information will provide the details and convenience that they need. Non-traditional marketing generates a buzz and sparks ideas and ideas are easy to latch on to and build upon. Unlike a newspaper or magazine, non-traditional marketing doesn't wait for a consumer to pick it up. It "picks up the consumer" and on their turf. Tactics are typically less expensive than traditional marketing

Build and maintain relationships with donors through social media

(David Neff, Lights, Camera, Help!)

Social media is an excellent way to reach out to people, interact with people with whom you already share a relationship, and continue to grow all sorts of connections that will hopefully be mutually beneficial. Social media is all about relationships. The foundation of those relationships is trust (which is extraordinarily important in a relationship) and credibility and what you hope to achieve at the end of that journey is a strong sense of loyalty on everyone's part. The stronger your relationship with others, the more loyalty will be a key element in the relationships.

There are many different ways in which to build and maintain relationships. One way in which people say that they are interested in having a relationship with you is by "liking" your Facebook Fan page, for example. When they agree to opt in, they are building a relationship with you. The more loyal connections you have for your business, the easier it will be to build your reputation online and to get people to feel that you are a person whom they can trust.

You might be wondering where you should start when it comes to acquiring loyal connections. There are several ways in which to do this. An easy one is by letting people know that your brand can be accessed through social media and you would like to interact with them through the many channels on which you are both connected. The more you get your word out there online, the more people will want to connect with you and your business. Many people will interact with you simply because they are interested in what you have to say. However, it won't hurt to offer them some sort of incentive also, if you feel that it is appropriate.

Social Media for Event Planning

Maintain a clean up-to-date media contact list

(Callie Langford, CASA of Travis County)

Increasing the organizations contacts on LinkedIn or Twitter can help find suppliers, get a quick answer to a business question or generate new development leads. But it also helps tremendously when it comes to advertising for events, and having a set list of people/organizations to reach out to ready to go. It can be difficult to cultivate a media contact list from the ground up, so it is easiest if the organization starts with a clear strategy. A nonprofit should ask reflexive questions such as, “Why do we want to grow our contacts?”, “Is it to find new customers or drive traffic to our site?”. Different channels require different approaches. For example, increasing contacts on Facebook will have different benefits to growing your LinkedIn recommendations.

Next, the organization should keep a record of all contacts. Whether you meet online or at events, meeting and conferences, make sure you get all new contacts’ social networking details such as their Twitter username, LinkedIn profile and Facebook page. Never dismiss anybody just because you met them in a social forum or during an online chat. However, don’t try the hard sell in a social environment though, you could annoy more people than you think.

Target the main player. Does your organization know a particularly well-connected business partner? Invest in that relationship as it could mean a whole new lot of contacts coming your way. Do not just communicate online but make an effort to meet them face to face, say at a trade fair. Then let them tweet. Many of your existing offline contacts will probably already be on Twitter, so start by sending them an email asking them to follow you and follow them back. But most importantly ensure your tweets are relevant, interesting and friendly. Do not concentrate on sales messages or product pushes but vary tweets with broader topics and updates from your sector.

Boost connections on LinkedIn. Increase the contacts in your network by browsing your contacts' connections. LinkedIn will calculate your 'degrees of separation' and you can use common connections as a starting point for making new contacts. New contacts expose you to an even wider range of people through their friends and business partners.

Build a community on Facebook. This is where your existing fans and customers meet so you should engage differently. However, it is a good place to start word-of-mouth campaigns to draw more people, maybe their friends, to become fans. Your pages' main message should be that this is a place for social contacts, not just your brand or business.

Overall, never let a chance go by. From time to time, ask visitors to your website, your Twitter followers or visitors to your Facebook page if they want to join your mailing list. Provide a link to a sign-up page on your website to make it easy for them and then easy for you to create a clean and clear contact list to send out event promotions to.

Use printed material to complement the event on social media

(Missy Strittmatter, Ronald McDonald House Austin)

Many people would say that print media is already dead. The Internet is now the default route if you need to market your business. But for a smart marketer, it is understand that both methods can actually complement each other to launch a powerful marketing campaign. Missy Strittmatter runs the large events for the Ronald McDonald House of Austin, including the Annual Bandanna Ball at the Wild Onion Ranch. She advocates for printed material to complement online material, saying that people still really like to "have that paper invitation to stick on the fridge as a reminder for the event". While people are not calling in or mailing in a "yes or a no" anymore for events, they still like the visual reminder to prompt them to get online and register.

Brochures and event flyers can only carry so much information. Adding extra panels to accommodate more details can be unfeasible especially if the organization has a limited budget. The best thing to do is to pique the curiosity of the prospective customers with the brochures and motivate them to visit the event site to know more about the details of the event. If the city feels like a community, as it does in Austin, Texas, printed advertising in local bars and public places is key. So many locally run businesses and the constant flow of festivals to advertise at, allow for printed material to get a proper debut and actually contribute to getting people to register for the event.

Use social media to publicly recognize event sponsors

(Missy Strittmatter, Ronald McDonald House Austin)

If an organization works with corporate sponsors, the marketing team probably put some thought into defining the different levels of sponsorship and what to include in each. Such perks can help lure new sponsors by offering a return on their investment beyond just a charitable contribution or can tempt existing sponsors to increase their donation.

There is an entire realm of perks an organization can offer to increase the value of the sponsorship packages. By thinking about ways to incorporate online resources into the packages, including websites, email and social media, nonprofits might find exciting new ways to draw sponsors and let their community know about the businesses that help make their programs possible.

Designing such key communications as emails to the list, or a sign-up page, using a sponsor's corporate colors, fonts and other branding elements can draw a strong connection between them and the event. If the nature of the website makes it difficult to incorporate someone else's brand, consider creating a micro-site. It is simply a small, separate site just for the event. Organizations ought not forget the possibility of using social media channels to recognize their sponsors. NPO's could include a commitment to write about their partnership. Missy Strittmatter says that "your organization could agree to mention them in one blog post, twice on Facebook and four times on Twitter".

If the organization has a blog, one could offer sponsors a guest post about something cause-related that overlaps with your mission and could hold a contest to find the employee who is most enthusiastic about your cause and then hand them the reins of your Twitter feed or Facebook page for a day.

Multimedia can be a compelling way to recognize sponsors. Consider a photo with key staff members from the sponsor's company, or a video interview. If they provide a branded banner or sign, the NPO could use it for a backdrop. If the organization is hosting a live event, take pictures of participants in front of it and post them on the Facebook page or with the event photos. More and more nonprofits are creating live webcasts or Twitter streams during conferences, speakers or galas. If this makes sense for a nonprofit's brand, it presents another opportunity for sponsorship or even naming rights. For example, American Express could provide the official, branded webcast of a compelling presentation given by an expert on a certain cause, or assign an employee to be the official-provider of live Tweets or blog posts.

Consider introducing a large sponsor, or one particularly well aligned with the mission, in an email to your community. The marketing representative could explain the things they offer that might be of benefit, or offer more general outreach on their behalf. Make sure it is not sending emails that are blatant advertisements without any value for your list members. An organization may risk alienating the constituents who signed up to hear specifically about the cause.

It is not likely that all of these methods will make sense for the organization, so pick and choose those that do, but be sure to weigh the fundraising potential of sponsorship against the risk of jeopardizing the relationship with the rest of the community. Seek a balance. Plastering every webpage and email with sponsors' ads might raise money for the organization, but it is also liable to diminish your credibility with constituents and other funders. With a little thought, a nonprofit might discover opportunities to define online perks that raise sponsorship dollars, advance their cause, and maybe even provide some online activities that would not be possible without it.

Use social media to overall enrich the event experience

(Evelyn Galante, Greenlights for Nonprofit Success)

Evelyn Galante exclaims, “I’m always amazed at how little social media directors do during their events.” Part of keeping the experience alive and fresh, is live tweeting and posting during the event too.

The social media event updates should not stop when your event starts. Remember, there may be people asking questions about the event even when they are on-site. Beyond engaging attendees, effective use of social media at the event can be a great way to catch the attention of others who are not in attendance. When people start tweeting and posting on Facebook about what a great time they are having at a concert or interesting bits of information about a conference session, their friends and followers then learn about the event.

There are a few ways you can encourage interactions from event attendees and make sure your event social media is successful. After creating a great hashtag, as suggested before, Print your hashtag or social media account on shirts, signs, banners… anything. The nonprofit can sell these items or have event volunteers wear them. Visuals are a necessity. Even pens and coffee mugs prove effective. Just make sure the hashtag, twitter handle or Facebook URL are seen.

Set up the big screen. Display it and they will come. Concerts, conferences, receptions, business networking, and cocktail events are only a few examples of opportunities to set up screens to display social media feeds on. Attendees will be more likely to post comments and questions when they see the proof of their efforts. It’s interesting to see a conversation on a big screen because you find out things one organization can only learn from others.

Staff is the glue to it all. The organization's staff should be responsible for making the Twitter name known and encouraging attendees to post on social media. Announcing the hashtags, wearing hashtag shirts, and displaying banners or signs are all important methods of ensuring that the audience knows where to find the event and the nonprofit on social media sites.

Remember, what social media resources the nonprofits chooses for the live event and how one can use them all depend on what kind of event the company is hosting or attending. The chosen platforms, method of delivery, topics and interactions should pertain to the audience and what is most likely to excite them at the moment. No matter what attendees are saying, it is important to make sure someone can answer their questions as quickly as possible. Doing so will reflect positively on your company and on your attendees' overall experience at your event.

Social Media for Volunteer Recruitment and Engagement

Encourage volunteers to blog or post about experiences

(Jan Gunter, Ronald McDonald House Austin)

The nonprofit sector desperately needs the professional skills offered by volunteers. The nation's nonprofits are under strain from the current economic crisis, a leadership drain as older executives retire, and high turnover among younger nonprofit staff . Volunteers are an undervalued and underused resource for tackling these challenges.

Volunteers, for example, can help nonprofits save money by providing technology services, developing programs, training staff , and conducting strategic planning, all without being paid a salary. Volunteers can also ease financial pressures by helping nonprofits raise money. Volunteers are effective fundraisers because their personal commitment to the organization's mission makes them convincing advocates for the cause. In addition, volunteers are likely to donate to the organization at which they serve. Despite these benefits, few nonprofits use wide-scale volunteer mobilization as a principal funding strategy.

And it's not just money that's tight. The nonprofit sector is also facing a leadership crisis. Research has found that nonprofits can expect to lose more than 50 percent of their current leadership by 2010. Nonprofits also face high turnover rates among mid-level and entry-level professional staff . A 2007 study by the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network found that 45 percent of nonprofit workers predict that their next job will not be at a nonprofit. These young staffers cited burnout among the top reasons for leaving.

To alleviate staff burnout, nonprofits can bring in older, experienced volunteers. Retired baby boomer volunteers can mentor young nonprofit professionals, leading to improved staff morale and lower turnover. Volunteers can also take on leadership roles formerly performed by paid staff . In some instances, volunteers can even manage paid staff .

Some work is simply best performed by volunteers. Local volunteers may know their community's assets, important players, and underlying challenges better than any paid staff person, helping the nonprofit stay connected to the community. Volunteers can also serve as evangelists to the larger community, helping to promote the nonprofit and its mission.

Use video or other creative media to make volunteers feel special

(Callie Langford, CASA of Travis County)

One thing all non profit organizations have in common are the scores of dedicated volunteers that help their organization run. Community theaters, school organizations, service clubs, churches and other religious organizations, art appreciation societies and many other types of non profits and community groups couldn't function without their volunteers.

According to "Volunteering in America", 63.5 million volunteers in the US give 8.1 billion hours to non profit organizations each year for a dollar value of over $150 billion dollars. Wow! No wonder organizations go out of their way to show their volunteers how much they mean to them. From small notes or gifts of appreciation to large events and reward programs, organizations continually look for new ways to thank their volunteers. This lens will show you a variety of ideas and sites you can use to thank your volunteers for their gift of service.

One obstacle all non-profits have to overcome in order to properly thank their volunteers is a lack of time. Let's face it, one of the reasons we need our volunteers so desperately is because we don't have the staff time (or money) to do all the work ourselves! Their time is valuable to us because we're generally short-staffed at any given time. You absolutely must make a plan for volunteer appreciation. Just like most businesses and organizations make a business plan and a marketing plan, organizations should also employ a volunteer appreciation plan.

The best way to do this is to have a staff meeting with any of the people that need to develop this plan. Possible members would include volunteer managers, event managers, supervisors, office managers, and even volunteers who organize volunteer events or training.

Get a large calendar or project a computer program on the wall so that visual learners can participate effectively. This will help everyone communicate during the meeting as well. Prior to the meeting, map out any large events or times when your staff is already incredibly overloaded.

As a team, enter all events that you already have that are for volunteer appreciation. Don't forget to include training dates and meetings! These should always be marketed to your volunteers as a benefit of belonging to your organization and not as a regulated hoop to jump through. While you make this list look at the event names, times, places and talk about any glaring problems that you see. Is a regular event not being executed well because it takes place during a time of year when people can't attend? Now's the time to look at changing it.

Add a few new ideas to your yearly volunteer appreciation calendar, but don't over do it! See how these things work out and schedule another meeting either 6 months or one year in advance to review and make changes. Evaluate what you do, what kind of response you get from your volunteers and adapt accordingly.

Create options for social media followers to become volunteers

(Amanda Quraishi, Mobile Loaves and Fishes)

The first step in a successful volunteer program for your organization is attracting people to help out. In the hunt for volunteers, you can use social media to get some traction in your efforts by leveraging your existing social media network; in your volunteer recruitment efforts, if you are placing a generic posting on a nonprofit job board, chances are some of the people who see your ad may like your organization or be keyed into your cause, others may not. If you are already engaged in social media, your existing tools are the first place to start. You have already established a connection and presence with people who care enough about your cause to follow you in some way. Your messages to your twitter followers or Facebook fans have by default become more targeted because they are people who are already interested in what your organization represents. Design campaigns that go out to your existing networks.

Make opportunities shareable. Social media is called “social” for a reason. Increase your chances of being mentioned through word of mouth in the by giving people who sign up easy ways of sharing your organization’s project with their friends. For Facebook get a more tech savvy staff member to use integrations so when users sign up to volunteer with you, they have an option to share that message with their friends. For Twitter create a hashtag for your event and use it for tweets related to the volunteer project. Then use Twitter’s Widget Tool to create a badge that shows all the tweets about the event based on the event.It will give people the impression that there’s a buzz about it and also give users a way to signal to each other that they are participating in the same event.

Connect with influencers and widen the scope of your influence after getting the word out in your own circles, start engaging individuals with high leverage points in your target audiences. By getting buy-in from people who have wide audiences, your volunteer opportunities will not only be exposed to a larger number of relevant people, but will likely come from someone who is trusted in the community you are trying to reach.

Creating and Implementing a Social Media Policy

Create a do's and don'ts list

(David Neff, Lights, Camera, Help!)

A good social media policy will provide clear guidelines as to what staff should and shouldn't do when posting and interacting with the community on a day-to-day basis. Your organization can create a policy to help guide your whole staff simply by thinking about how you would like to make use of social media.

Creating an effective social media policy for your nonprofit requires that you take a two-fold approach:

1. Managing the organization's social media presence, and
2. Considering Employees' Personal Use of Social Media and its reflection on the organization

The organization should evaluate the potential issues associated with both aspects as you develop your social media policy. What are the unique characteristics of your organization that will affect your policy? How does the organization utilize social media? How can they better utilize social media? Do employees use their personal accounts to promote the organization? Your nonprofit may use social media sites to post pictures, recruit volunteers, or share updates on programs and activities. Nonprofits involved in disaster relief may utilize social network to engage volunteers, solicit donations, or share news on the disaster event. Getting a firm grasp on your organization's use of social media, including who interacts with the organization online and the types of information the organization shares online, will help as your write your policy.

The social media policy should clearly communicate to employees the importance of keeping the organization's reputation in mind and how their behavior can affect the organization. Social media sites allow the organization to reach out to donors, board members, volunteers, and other potential partners. An angry status update or tweet from an employee can harm the organization's reputation.

Employees should also know who speaks for the organization and what they can and cannot say. Specifically identify the types of information regarding confidential issues or proprietary information that cannot be shared. You may ask that employees include a disclaimer for statements on issues your nonprofit is involved in to prevent any confusion. This allows the employee to still share their opinion while making it clear that the opinion is his own and not necessarily the organization's.

Your organization's social media policy should also include examples. Employees will have a clearer understanding of the policy if they can see what is acceptable, what is questionable, and what is unacceptable. Before rolling out the policy, you may also want to gather feedback from employees to ensure that it is clear and helpful. The better your employees understand the policy, the more likely it will be honored. Keeping the social media policy updated is important as well. As social media sites evolve, potential risks you could not anticipate may arise. Your organization's social media presence may also change.

Keep in mind legal issues that are unique to your organization

(Callie Langford, CASA of Travis County)

To touch upon some of the common legal issues associated with nonprofit organizations' and associations' use of social media and provide guidance on how to avoid them. Specifically, one can analyze the intellectual property, insurance, and solicitation issues surrounding a nonprofit entity's use of social media and the steps that can be taken to mitigate these risks.

Because social media sites enable users to post comments and upload their own content, nonprofit organizations and associations should take steps to avoid allegations of copyright and trademark infringement. This can be accomplished by monitoring content that is posted to the organization's social media sites, whether by employees or users of the site. Any third party content, including text, photos, trademarks, graphics, or other media content, that is posted on a social media site without the owner's permission may constitute copyright and/or trademark infringement and should be removed from the site. While some uses of copyrights or trademarks may constitute "fair use," it is best to obtain permission.

Nonprofit organizations and associations should also monitor the online use by others of their own trademarks, service marks, names, logos, and designs, as improper or unauthorized use will detract from the value, impact, and distinctiveness of the marks. In addition, nonprofits should take precautions when using a person's likeness on their social media sites. Specifically, when posting photos or videos of someone, it is advisable to obtain a publicity release from that person, especially if the likeness is being used for a commercial purpose.

Whenever a nonprofit organization utilizes social media as part of its business operations, it is recommended that the organization's insurance policies (such as its directors and officers, media, and errors and omissions policies) be examined to ensure that coverage is up-to-date and extends to claims resulting from the use of social media. If not, additional coverage that encompasses social media should be obtained from the nonprofit organization's insurance agent or broker. Of course, because it is impossible to obtain coverage that protects against all risk, it is also important to have in place a comprehensive social media policy (discussed further below) to minimize exposure that is not covered by its insurance policies.

Nonprofits should be aware that the Federal Trade Commission's recently updated Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising (the "Guides") are applicable to "consumer" testimonials, such as reviews and recommendations that endorse a product or service on any social media site. The Guides require disclosure of any connection between the endorser (which for a nonprofit organization could be an employee or member) and the advertiser, in this case the nonprofit (Cleland).

The Guides require advertisers to advise the consumer giving the testimonial that the connection has to be disclosed and to have procedures in place aimed at monitoring the consumer's postings for compliance with the disclosure requirement. Failure to comply with the Guides may result in liability for not only the advertiser, but also for the individual giving the testimonial. So nonprofit organizations and associations should ensure proper disclosure in connection with any endorsement or testimonial.

Using websites to solicit charitable contributions is becoming increasingly popular. But Section 501(c)(3) organizations need to be aware that state charitable solicitation laws may apply to both traditional and web-based fundraising, such as accepting donations through a website.

Moreover, states have different laws governing the solicitation of charitable contributions. Generally, these laws mandate that charitable organizations register with a state agency prior to soliciting contributions from residents of the state. This, of course, poses a problem, since soliciting contributions via the internet has the potential to reach donors in all fifty states. Nonprofits may attempt to limit the geographic scope of donations they accept by, for example, posting disclaimers on their donation page stipulating that they only accept contributions from the states in which they are registered or removing states in which they are not registered from the pull down menu on their donation page. On the other hand, compliance with all applicable laws is important and registration and reporting in all applicable states will be required for national fundraising campaigns.

Create clear guidelines about who controls posting on each platform

(Callie Langford, CASA of Travis County)

Like any publicity or marketing for a nonprofit, it is easiest when someone/a group of people have a defined role of 'gatekeeper' for posting information. It is important to consider who is going to implement your organization's social media strategy. Whether you hire someone new or entrust an existing employee with the role, the person in charge should be comfortable using the tools, passionate about your organization's programs, and should enjoy interacting with other people. It is after all, called "social media." That said, social media should not exist in a silo and be implemented as a supplemental channel by "a young intern alone in the corner." It needs to be owned by the entire organization.

According to Riley West, UT graduate student and social media intern for both Austin Art Alliance and The Ronald McDonald House of Austin, “there are definitely pros and cons to using volunteers and interns to implement your social media strategy. On the one hand, it is a great to begin testing social media without the investment of staff time, particularly when budgets are lean. On the other hand, it may not be an effective in the long run. What happens when your intern moves on? Does anyone staff know how to manage the Facebook Fan Page left behind?” (West, April 9th) Consider whether your staff may need additional training or could benefit from outside expertise as part of the implementation. Very little knowledge of technology is needed for someone on the board or even an intern/volunteer to utilize all social media sites. Most nonprofits have whole positions dedicated to social media/social communications positions, but you can also consider recruiting some technologically savvy board members. The most important thing is that tone, writing style, and frequency of posts is consistent for your organization’s social media sites.

Host trainings to set expectations for volunteers and new staff

(David Neff, Lights, Camera, Help!)

Before getting started, it is important to recruit a core team to plan, execute and maintain the social media training program. While the composition of the team may vary from organization to organization, it should include at least one social media strategist, tasked with managing the company’s overall social media strategy, which includes the social media education program. The social media strategist then works with the existing corporate training group within the organization to pull in the appropriate resources. “Social media training shouldn’t be separated from existing corporate education,” Altimeter Group’s Jeremiah Owyang said, stressing that all on-boarding and ongoing training should be tightly integrated and housed in one location.

Steve Pratt, director of employee training and development at Constant Contact, agrees that integration is key. New hires at Constant Contact typically complete three weeks of on-boarding training to learn about the company’s history, culture and systems. During that time, new hires also receive an overview of social media. Employees can then take more social media courses as they are offered. Beyond the strategist and training group, other key team members could come from the following areas within a company:

- Marketing: To keep company messaging consistent
- Legal: To review social media policies and guidelines
- Product: To integrate current company offerings into the training
- Web Development: To create an online portal for training assets

While some organizations will find all the human capital they need to develop a program internally, others will find it necessary to pull external experts to help put the pieces together. In either case, it could be helpful to assemble a board of social media advisors who have previously set up education programs, their tips and best practices could save your organization a lot of time.

The curriculum of a social media education program depends on the goal-planning and benchmarking that take place early on in the development process, but here are a few ideas to get you started. At Constant Contact, users take a 20-minute e-learning course prior to attending in-person courses. The e-learning course covers the basics of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and is meant to "give people a baseline of knowledge before they come into class," explained Pratt. A sample screen of the course is pictured above. After taking the e-learning course, users attend instructor-led classes that last 90 minutes to two hours and include "demonstrations of some of the key tools and functionalities, hands-on activities where people get a chance to practice with the help of a facilitator, and customer case studies," said Pratt.

Liz Bullock, who leads Dell's Social Media and Communities (SMaC) University, explained Dell's social media education program. "In the first class that we offer, we roll up our social media policy into five principles, that way, it's very easy for employees to understand it and quickly grasp what they need to do, the rules, and the best items for engaging with customers," said Bullock. After employees complete that course, they move onto strategy-based courses that focus on how to use specific social media platforms. In those classes, Dell subject matter experts share their best practices and tips for engaging with users on each platform; classes are highly scenario-based with lots of actual case studies that enable employees to think through how they would act in certain situations.

Intel's program begins with an introductory course on why social media is important for the company and at large, and then spans a broad range of level-specific topics in more than 60 online courses. Depending on an employee's level as determined by the Digital IQ quiz, they are assigned two to eight mandatory courses. Above and beyond those courses, they can choose electives that pertain to their interests. Walter noted that people often complete many more courses than are assigned to them out of pure enthusiasm to improve. To date, Intel has trained nearly 2,000 Social Media Practitioners (SMPs) and nearly 20,000 Digital IQ courses have been completed in total. Social media platforms and best practices change constantly, remember to update materials as functionalities and community standards evolve.

Conclusion

Media technology is constantly changing, constantly challenged with new trends and marketing techniques that nonprofit organizations are going to have to keep track of if they want to compete in their sector, let alone the global marketplace as a whole. This video series and in depth description on how to produce these campaigns and why they are important should act as a guide to most small to mid-sized nonprofits that are struggling to step into the social sphere.

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