

Social Media for Nonprofits Resource Guide

February 2010

Overview

In recent years, massive innovation in internet technology has changed the way people stay connected to one another. This has created many avenues for people to contact friends, do business, get news, and support causes they believe in by connection with them through the online communities and resources created on social media websites. Social media uses internet tools to foster interactions in different ways. Related terms that are often used synonymously are social networking (using social media for the purpose of networking) and social marketing (using social media for the purposes of marketing and advertising). Popular social media websites include Facebook, Linked-In, and Twitter.

These websites also have created applications for organizations to connect with individuals through online communities. Nonprofits are able to create pages, groups, and accounts to connect with potential supporters and donors. Social networking websites are a useful tool for nonprofits because they offer a low cost way to connect with supporters, clients, and the community, e.g. to raise funds and promote events. They also provides opportunities for organizations to tap into the expertise of their younger employees, who use these media all the time. The private sector is increasingly turning to social media:

"Social networking is fast becoming the way people and companies collaborate and find new businesses. That's one reason General Electric employed a Tweet Squad this month. Modeled on Best Buy's Geek Squad, it is made up of 10 fresh-faced employees who help GE's boomers and Gen-Xers become fluent social networkers." - *Business Week*, 6/1/09, p. 21

Though many organizations have been successful at establishing a presence on these sites and gathering a base of supporters, translating that online activity into more effective marketing, communications, and programming remains a challenge.

This guide brings together some tips and best practices to help a nonprofit build an effective presence on social media websites. In addition, VNR's 6th edition of the *Resource Directory for Nonprofit Capacity Building in Los Angeles County* (available for free on VNR's website) includes listings for technology consultants and organizations that may be of assistance in planning how to use social media.

Tips for Getting Started

Tip #1: Do Research

Become familiar with the different sites that are out there and the populations who use them, so that connections can be created with people who will find the nonprofit's mission relevant. Find out which of your organization's supporters are already on particular social networks to begin establishing connections. Visit pages of similar nonprofits to get ideas about tactics being used.

Tip #2: Have a strategy

Maintaining a profile on a social media site is like maintaining a small website - it requires frequent updates to keep content fresh while also expanding the list of contacts on the site. Don't try to tackle establishing a presence on many sites at once. It is better to establish and maintain a profile on a few, carefully-chosen networks. Be sure to identify what the nonprofit wants to accomplish through a presence on a social media site, to be able to measure the success of its efforts over time.

Tip #3: Allocate Resources

Set aside a reasonable amount of resources in of staff time and effort that will be dedicated to creating the profile, cultivating your contacts, and updating content. Is it very possible that you may have a young staff member who is already familiar with using these websites who can spearhead these efforts.

Tip #4: Look at Possible Challenges

Use of social networking sites don't always produce the same successes for all organizations. There are many reasons make establishing a presence on one of these sites a challenge, such as: there are not enough staff resources to do site maintenance, or the target population does not use these sites.

Popular Social Media Websites

Following are a few of popular social media websites that offer tools for nonprofits and other organizations to use in promoting their activities and missions.

Facebook : www.facebook.com

Facebook is a free-access social networking website where users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region to connect and interact with other people. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profile to notify friends about themselves. To date, they report having more that 150 million active users.

Options:

Pages can only be created to represent a real public figure, artist, brand or organization, and may only be created by that entity or it's official representative. Pages can be customized with media and interactive applications to engage Page visitors. Individuals can then become "Fans" of organizations, public figures, or other entities who have "Pages." Becoming a "Fan" enables users to receive messages, updates, event invitations, and interact with other "Fans." Pages typically include the following information: organization's mission, website address, organizational overview, and pictures. There is also a function to post articles and other resources (similar to a blog), a discussion board where fans can connect with each other, and a space to promote events and track RSVPs.

Linked In: www.linkedin.com

Linked In is a networking site for experienced professionals. Users come from around the world and currently represent 170 industries and 200 countries. It is designed so that users will be able to find, be introduced to, and collaborate with qualified professionals in order to accomplish their goals. Linked In works by assembling groups together around different topic areas and affinities to facilitate exchange of information and expertises.

Options:

Linked In Groups consist of collegiate and professional school alumni associations, corporate alumni groups, professional organizations, networking groups, and event and trade show organizers. Group features offer members a private space to strengthen old business contacts, and to be introduced to new ones. The space offers a forum for topics to be discussed with like-minded professionals and solutions to be discovered.

MySpace: www.myspace.com

MySpace is social networking website that offers users the ability to create profiles, blogs, message boards, post videos and photos, and promote events. It also has a classified add section where nonprofits can post job listings for free.

Options

Nonprofits can create pages and be search for using Myspace Impact. This feature assists nonprofit organizations and political campaigns in their efforts to make a positive difference in the world by helping them leverage the free tools of the MySpace platform to inform, inspire, and motivate users.

Twitter: www.twitter.com

Twitter is a real time short term messaging service that works over multiple networks and devices. Users can access information as it happens by following the sources most relevant to them - from news sources to friends. Twitter asks one question, "What are you doing?"

Options

Answers must be under 140 characters in length and can be sent via mobile texting, instant message, or the web. Users do not expect a response when sending messages via Twitter. It provides users the ability to pick and choose the updates they'd like to receive, when they want to receive them, and what device they'd like to use.

YouTube: www.youtube.com

YouTube allows people to easily upload and share video clips and across the Internet through websites, mobile devices, blogs, and email. Everyone can watch videos on YouTube. People can see first-hand accounts of current events, find videos about their hobbies and interests. Videos also can be embedded on blogs and websites, so they can be shared.

Options

Nonprofit Program: For organizations that have a compelling story to tell or want to connect with supporters, volunteers, and donors, but don't have the funds to launch expensive outreach campaigns. Benefits include:

- * Premium branding capabilities and increased uploading capacity
- * The option to drive fundraising through a Google Checkout "Donate" button
- * Listing on the Nonprofit channels and the Nonprofit videos pages on the website
- * Ability to add a Call-to-action overlay on your videos to drive campaigns

Flickr: www.flickr.com

Flickr lets users store, sort, search, and share photos. Photos can be uploaded via the website, mobile devices, email, or various desktop programs. It is a free service that has some fee options for enhanced usability. While Flickr does not offer individual user blogs it does allow users to join or form groups where members can share photos.

Options

Flickr users can add comments to photos and supports tagging (where you can add a key word to an image so that users and search engines can easily find it). If you publish your images on the side under a Creative Commons license, it also allows other users to add them to their blogs.

Resources

This section provides contact information for publications mentioned in the *Guide*, plus several websites Valley nonprofits may find useful in dealing with the challenges of the recession.

Websites

Common Knowledge

www.commonknow.com

Common Knowledge offers a variety of free downloadable resources on fundraising, advocacy, marketing and communications for nonprofit organizations. They also regularly host free webinar trainings on social media topics.

Diossa Communications

<http://www.diossacommunications.com/nonprofit.htm>

Diossa Communications publishes a monthly e-newsletter that includes MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and Change.org Best Practices for Nonprofit Organizations.

NTEN - Nonprofit Technology Network

www.nten.org

NTEN is a membership organization of nonprofit professionals who put technology to use for their causes, share technology solutions across the sector and support each other's work.

TechSoup

www.techsoup.org

TechSoup offers nonprofits a one-stop resource for technology needs by providing free information, resources, and support.

The Port

www.theport.com

The Port provides social networking and social media solutions for nonprofits. It features free downloadable tool kits and white papers on social media strategies.

Articles and Publications

Bonfield B. (2008) Should your organization use social networking sites? Available at: http://www.idealware.org/articles/should_you_social_network.php

Buggs S. (2008) Business of giving: nonprofits should make use of social networking. Available at: <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/business/buggs/5872444.html>

Diossa Communications. (2009) Best Facebook practices for nonprofits. Available at: <http://www.diossacommunications.com/facebookbestpractices.htm>

HersheyCause Communications. (2009) Online Outreach Tools Guide. Available at: <http://hersheycause.com/clients-cause.php>

Kanter B. (2008) Eight secrets of effective online networking. Available at: <http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page8075.cfm>

Kanter B. (2008) Determining your social network needs. Available at: <http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page8054.cfm>

NTEN, Common Knowledge, The Port (2009) Nonprofit social networking survey report. www.nonprofitsocialnetworksurvey.com

PBP Executive Reports. (2009) Facebook, Twitter and Your Employees: The dangers of social networking. Available at: <http://www.pbpexecutivereports.com/er.asp?o=13P&L=net2D&id=1597756904>

Satterfield B. (2006) What can social networking do for your organization? Available at: <http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/archives/page9215.cfm>

Social Media Buying Guide. (2009) A few social networking technical terms used in reference to a custom online community. Available at: <http://www.socialmediabuyingguide.org/indepth>

Tech Soup. (2009) Using Facebook for your nonprofit. Available at: <http://www.techsoup.org/community/facebook/index.cfm>

Wasley P. (2009) More charities are on social networks - but few have raised much. *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. May 7, 2009, p. 21.

Wong W. (2008) How nonprofits are using social networking sites. Available at: <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2008/apr/30/business/chi-wed-nonprofit-networks-apr30>