

SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES FOR NON-PROFITS

2015 GUIDE

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Social Media Practices for Non-Profits

Introduction

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have made their way into our everyday lives. There are over 1.5 billion active Facebook users alone¹. That is just about the size of China, the world's most populated country! That being said, social media is a great way to catch the attention of prospective volunteers, sponsors, and donors for non-profit organizations. It can reach people across the globe, its 24/7, and at little to no cost! This guide's purpose is to help non-profit organizations tap into the invaluable (and mostly free) resources of social media.

Background

Social media can be a great tool for organizations to engage and interact with the public. In this guide we will focus mainly on the top two “micro blogging” sites Facebook and Twitter. In order to utilize these tools it is important to understand the demographics of both who is using social media and who is volunteering.

Demographics of Social Media Users

When selecting your social media platform make sure it's the right fit! The following table includes demographics on the main social media tools.

¹ Dewey, 2014

Table 1. Comparison of Social Media Platforms²

Facebook 	1.3 billion users This site is the most popular of them all. It is good for short posts, pictures, videos, or telling stories. You can tag people and like their posts. It is a great site for communication and having a complete profile for your organization.
LinkedIn 	347 million users This is a site for networking in the career world. It also has a volunteer matching program. It is popular among educated, high-level income, middle age adults (30-49) advancing their careers as well as recent college graduates.
Instagram 	300 million users This site is good for posting pictures and quick videos. You can use “filters” to spice up your photos and can tag people. This site also uses #hashtags to categorize posts.
Twitter 	288 million users This site is good for quick posts. You can only type 140 characters in each post. It’s where the infamous #hashtag comes from. You can put a # in front of a saying such as #nationalvolunteerweek and people can click on it and see all the times someone else wrote on that same topic.
Tumblr 	230 million users This site sets up personal blogging websites for its users.
Snapchat 	200 million users This is an app for cell phones, not a site. It’s good for quick little videos (they disappear after a certain amount of time). This is mostly used by teenagers and young adults.
Pinterest 	70 million users This is a site where people create their own online vision boards that are categorized by wedding ideas, arts and crafts, fashion, recipes, etc.

² Pew Research Center, 2015 & Statista, 2015

Volunteer Demographics

The following individuals and groups were found to be more likely to volunteer by multiple studies and surveys:

- Churches
- Sports groups
- School clubs
- Educated
- More social networks
- If asked in person or on an individual basis
- If they relate to the other people volunteering or who they see engaged in social media sites (those with similar demographics).³

TIP: You can see YOUR demographics on Facebook by going to the “People” tab under “Insights”. They’ll break down your audience’s gender, age, and language in percentages.

So, it makes sense really – people are more likely to volunteer if they are plugged into more social networks. Try tapping into these populations for more volunteers!

³ Wiepking & Maas, 2009; Clerkin et al. 2013; Waters & Lo 2012; and Naylor, Lamberton, & West 2012

List of Best Practices

Post Engaging Content

So what should you post? First of all, posts should be diverse in content and shouldn't just follow one simple cookie cutter pattern. A study at the University at Buffalo, SUNY found a great approach to content.⁴ They created the Information-Community-Action model. This is how it's broken down:



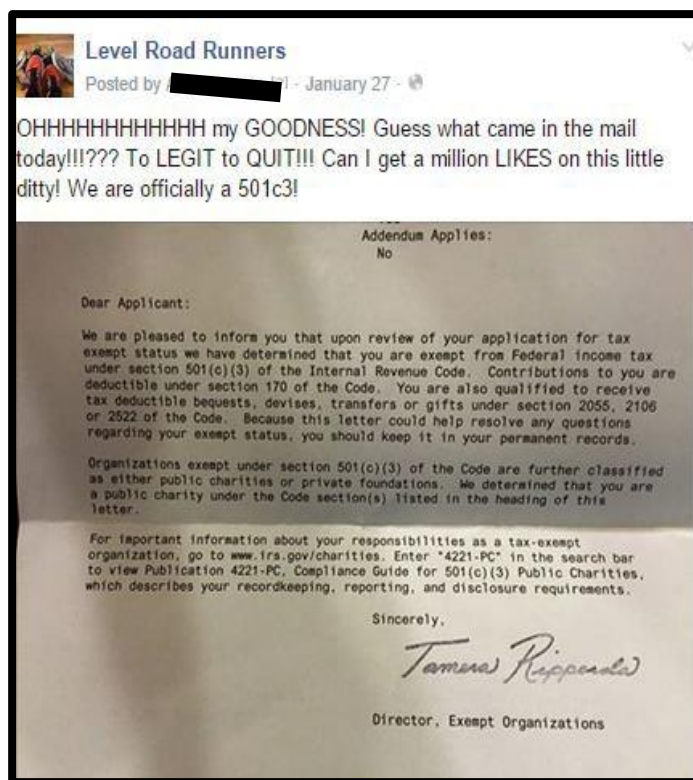
Information:

These are posts that are strictly about getting information out. It may be about the history of the organization, their mission/goals, or about an event. These posts aren't soliciting anything and can strengthen ties with your community because you aren't asking for anything in return.

⁴ Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012)

Community:

These are posts that involve more interaction. It could be asking people to share a post, or having a contest to see how many “likes” or “retweets” you can get. It is also about answering questions and providing feedback. They create a two-way relationship between the audience and the organization.



Action:

These are the posts that specifically ask for donations, sponsors, and volunteers. They tell people how and where they can donate and volunteer.

It is important to have an equal distribution of these three types of content. For example, if all you do is use the action format, people may get sick of you just asking for volunteers and donations. Instead, make sure you are also posting about information (getting buy-

in for your cause) and community (creating the two-way relationship). It's important to note⁷ that posts can have a combination of all three of these!

Personalize your posts and use a conversational tone

Providing a human presence on social media can impact the organization's relationship with the public. Allowing your followers to communicate directly with a known individual rather than a faceless organization, makes the interactions interesting and provides more opportunities for connection. Posting and commenting on social media as an individual is the best way to achieve the human element.

Similarly to maintaining a human presence online, using a conversational tone is important to keep your audience engaged. Make sure people know they are talking to an actual person and not just a lifeless organization.⁵ A simple way to do this is by mimicking the structure of an actual conversation.

Additionally, social presence can be achieved by making your users highly visible and attempt conversation in real-time.⁶ It's important to personalize your posts and to respond to your audience by name to make them feel validated and heard.

Provide a human presence by disclosing information about yourself.⁷ It doesn't have to be much, even starting a post with, "**Hey [insert name] here,**" or signing off with your name lets your audience know a real person is behind the post. Another option is to use a visual representation or an "avatar" when communicating online.⁸ For most social media

⁵ Park & Lee, 2013

⁶ Park & Lee, 2013, p. 265

⁷ Waters, 2014

⁸ Park & Lee, 2013

sites, you are limited to a profile picture, however having something representative of yourself can help remind people they are talking to a real person.

Be cautious of frequency

A lot of organizations join social media because it is “trendy” and may seem like the “thing to do”. They post very frequently because they think “the more the better”. Right? Wrong! Content has been shown to have more of an impact on engagement than frequency.⁹ Think of it like spam in your inbox. You get email after email after email when it all just starts to look the same! (Not that your organization is junk mail!) Try to make your content as concise as possible so you aren’t constantly filling your audience’s feed.

With this being said, you also don’t want to post too infrequently. So what is the right amount? It really depends on your type of organization. Larger organizations may find it reasonable to post several times a week, or even daily while smaller organizations only once. The key is to make sure you stay active and up to date. Studies have shown that you can lose your following and credibility if your profiles aren’t up to date.¹⁰

Photos and Videos

An organizational visual can build the most powerful and lasting impression on the public. Although you can achieve a lot through posting text content, there are three V’s to create video communication fronts: verbal, vocal, and visual¹¹. Photos and videos can also be an effective representation of your mission, programs, or services.

⁹ Simply Measured, 2013

¹⁰ Waters & Lo, 2012

¹¹ Waters & Jones, 2011

Having a visual can create a “brand” for your organization. An organization’s brand represents, “the entire identity based on an individual’s experiences with the organization, the mission and activities of the organization and its success stories”.¹² In particular, videos can build your audience’s impression and can put a face to your organization.¹³

YouTube videos including characteristics of professional appearance, emotional scenes, and clips of clients not speaking the highest ratings¹⁴. See the following recommendations for creating meaningful videos for your audience.

Six rules for powerful YouTube videos:

- 1) Tell a story – have a beginning intro, a middle with your climax, and then an end that wraps everything up
- 2) Be brief – Don’t make your audience wait for your video to load! Make it short and sweet so there is no way they can get bored.
- 3) Convey as much information as possible - Keep the video focused on only one situation, success story, or an individual or group to keep viewers engaged.
- 4) Remember your audience – Remember what is most important to them! This can steer them into the right direction (volunteering, donating, sponsoring).
- 5) Tell the viewer what you want from them - Videos have the potential to go viral, which can be a waste if they don’t direct viewers back to other conversations.

¹² Cliffe & Motion, 2005

¹³ Cliffe & Motion, 2005

¹⁴ Waters and Loo, 2011

- 6) Be genuine – “one of the most important ways that YouTube videos help build an organization’s identity is that the video bring the organization to life in a way that printed collateral and other marketing communications cannot”.¹⁵

Post your video on YouTube, your website, and all of your social media sites. The more ways to access - the better!

Try it! Have you thought about creating an internship? Team up with your local schools to get started today! This doesn’t have anything to do with social media... we just thought it was a great idea!

Tap into Millennials

How do you get the Millennial generation (born anywhere from 1980-2000) involved with your organization? This generation typically uses social media, which is why we are at a great start! In general, millennials are twofold on why they volunteer: they either want to make a change in the world or want it to look good on their resume for school or a job.¹⁶ Try to promote an event or two revolving around career-building opportunities. For example you can promote how students can learn leadership skills, conflict-management, team dynamics, etc. You can still do this while promoting HOW volunteering for your organization can promote change as well.

Millennials are more likely to volunteer if their friends are (talk about peer pressure!).

¹⁷ So, bluntly ask people to bring their friends! Volunteering at your organization can be their

¹⁵ Waters & Jones, 2011

¹⁶ dosomething.org National Survey, 2012

¹⁷ Loader, B., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M., 2014 & dosomething.org National Survey, 2012

new “thing” they do together on the weekends. Millennials are also more likely to volunteer

Make it easy to donate! Facebook now lets users send money through messenger.

if they see their friend “Sharing” something on social media - so ask

them to share! If you make it a social activity with their friends - they will come!

Getting users to like and share your posts

Don’t be afraid to ask your followers to take action online. If you’re aiming to create a post that gets shared, feel free to just ask! It won’t only benefit you but can make your audience feel they are contributing. For example, Level Road Runners most popular post asks, “Can I get a million LIKES on this little ditty?”¹⁸

Practice your briefness when aiming for a shared post. “Telling stories and using video seems to work well in the digital world.

Keep the message simple and embed a sense of urgency to spark sharing”.¹⁹ On Facebook, this

Try It - Run a contest! See who can get the most “likes” from sharing your posts, or who can do the most tweets, etc.

will ensure your post is still visible when it comes up as “shared” on another user’s feed.

Although being concise is important, remember to still keep your audience in mind. Always include something branded for other social media users (who aren’t currently following you) to get back to your organization’s main information.

Questions to ask when creating a post intended to be shared:

- 1) How does this add value for our audience?
- 2) How will this help or entertain them?

¹⁸ LRR Facebook Post, 2015

¹⁹ Swift, 2014, p. 1

3) Why will they share it?²⁰

Lead by example

Post pictures and videos of yourself and others engaged in activities to encourage others to participate. Showing followers that you are directly involved in the work of your

“In other words, there’s one thing technology hasn’t changed about public service. It takes time and effort”
(Quain, 2010, p. 38)

organization will make your activities (working, volunteering, donating, etc.) seem realistic. Social media is a great outlet to

peruse pages of people and organizations you find relatable. What is more encouraging than finding a meaningful cause that you can picture yourself contributing to?

Conclusion

Despite social media’s impact on engagement with non-profits, engagement is based on interest and passion for the social cause.²¹ Social media is really the first step in getting people to be involved with your organization. Once you get them, make sure you keep them there! Make sure your profiles and websites are always up to date and that it is easy for people to find out when/where/how to donate or volunteer. Find that balance of frequency. Work on your content. Have a conversation with your audience. Personalize. Post photos and videos. And keep it simple! We hope you find this guide helpful!

“The adoption of social media appears to have engendered new paradigms of public engagement”
(Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

²⁰ Swift, 2014

²¹ Lee & Ahn, 2013

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Cover image source: Brandingimage.com

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