

Tips for Social Media

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Eleven Quick Social Media Tips

I really only hoped to offer ten, but I just can't cut any of these.

When working with clients, "social media" often becomes a topic. Here are some quick tips groups should keep in mind when plotting their social media strategy.

But first, what do I mean by social media? I mean the many web tools that have been developed that allow for interactive online communications and relationships between people and organizations. Usually people are referring to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Beyond that there's a dizzying array of others that fit this category, such as Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+.

While most of my specific references below are to Twitter and Facebook, most of them advice applies across the board.

In no particular order.

1. Email is still king – don't neglect it.

Studies continues to show that effective emails to your constituency will secure far more action than communications to equivalent-sized social media lists. If you're going to pursue a social media strategy, be sure you're not stealing time that would otherwise have gone into making your email effective. If you are eating into email time, think twice about whether it's really worth that trade-off.

2. Don't silo your social media strategy

Some groups develop a social media strategy in the context of communications planning. This can easily silo it so that it's disconnected from other organizational endeavors where it has the most potential benefit.

Among other things, social media needs to be a tactic within fundraising, within any program that involves public education, advocacy, or outreach, and with volunteer recruitment. While someone should be your social media expert and should have some overall responsibility in the area, everyone should be literate in social media so that they can play a timely role in providing content and interacting with your constituents.

3. Know your audience

This is true of anything, but also true of social media. In general, Twitter tends to be younger and more urban than Facebook. Instagram is even younger. LinkedIn skews professional.

Beyond knowing them in generalities, consider whether you can know your audience individually. Some online constituency management programs allow you to match your donor/volunteer list to discover their social media identifies.

This can allow you to micro-target your activities. For example, if you know 5% of your members Twitter handles, you can send just them (and not the rest of your list) an email encouraging them to follow you on Twitter, participate in a twitter chat, etc.

4. Think it through

Don't rush into social media because everyone is doing it. Or because you instinctively know it has potential benefits. Ask yourself what you most want to get out of it? And put in writing a clear plan for how to get those benefits, even if the plan is as simple as a page or two.

Are you primarily using social media to build awareness, target specific decision-makers, rally an audience to take some action, or something else? Beware of saying all of the above.

Knowing what you want out of it can go a long way towards telling whether you should be focusing on Facebook, Twitter, or one of the other platforms or if you should work across multiple platforms.

Also, don't bite off more social media options than you can chew. Better to do one platform (e.g. Facebook) really well than two in a way that will come across poorly to current and potential supporters.

5. Recycle/Reuse content.

Don't assume that just because you've said something once (or twice) on social media that your audience has seen it.

Indeed, Facebook's new filtering means only about 10% of the people who "Like" your page will have any single one of your posts show up in their newsfeed, with only a subset of the 10% actually seeing it. Most people have twitter feeds that have far more tweets than they will see, so tweeting similar content at different times of the day maximizes the odds it will be seen.

In general, I recommend organizations post on Facebook 2-3 times per day and Tweet 3-9 times per day.

Depending on the circumstance, virtually identical content may be posted or tweeted a half a dozen times over a few days before you risk the negative of oversaturation.

6. Consider budgeting for ads, sponsored content, or promotions.

It's become clear that Facebook and Twitter's business model depends on some of its users plunking down cash to ensure that their information is shown to more people.

Just on Facebook, there are ways to "boost" your Facebook posts to make sure they show up in everyone's feed, to sponsor a story so that it shows up in the feed of those who have not yet liked your page (targeted by a dizzyingly large array of potential data points thanks to all the data Facebook has collected on us), or generate ads that promote your Page to be Liked.

Since the ads are relatively inexpensive (unless you want to reach a LOT of people), even smaller nonprofits should consider setting aside a few hundred dollars to try out different ways spending a little money might extend your ability to reach people.

7. Learn about what content gets liked, retweeted, or otherwise generates engagement.

As a general rule, content that includes pictures generates more engagement than those that are all text. Visuals with text can be especially powerful.

Content that includes links generate more than content without links.

Asking questions stimulates more interactions than making statements.

For reasons I'm not quite sure, statistics show that tweets about statistics are more likely to be retweeted.

Generalizations like these aren't always accurate.

And what works now may not work in a year because the tactic may become saturated.

So at least one person in your organization should regularly look for trainings, webinars and other sources of knowledge about trends in social media and should share what they learn back with the rest of your team.

8. Take writing and generating of content seriously

There's a tendency to under-emphasize the process of writing for social media since the writing itself is so short – in twitter's case just 140 characters.

But figuring out how to effectively say something in a sentence that might more naturally be said in three sentences usually takes *longer* than writing the three sentence version.

That means pre-writing much of your content so you can trot it out at a moment's notice if something happens that would make the post timely. Or you can use one of the various tools like HootSuite that allow you to prepare something and schedule it for automatic posting/tweeting so you don't have to be at work at 7:30 p.m. or 7:30 a.m. if you believe that's the best time to reach your audience.

As for generating content, everyone on staff should have an eye towards identifying what they are doing that might be useful on social media, rather than relegating that task to just one staff person.

And it also means thinking outside the box of just text. You should think about content that involves video, pictures, inspirational quotes, charts, graphs, and other infographics. Everyone should understand the basic tools out there like PicMonkey that easily allow you to superimpose your text on your images.

9. Don't just act, interact

If you want to grow both your lists and your impact, interaction is a must.

Don't just post or tweet. Consume the work of others who you want to engage.

Respond to their tweets. Retweet them. Comment on their Facebook posts. Share their posts.

Use hashtags to reach people interested in a trending topic who might not already be on your lists.

If you want people to help and carry your message, you want them to observe you doing the same.

10. Ask your audience to help

In the end, don't forget to include "calls to action" in many of your communications. There's a tendency when you're on the inside of your organization to assume everyone with whom you're interacting will think for themselves: "oh, it's time to help them by doing X."

Occasionally, you will be the spontaneous beneficiary of someone's assistance. But more often, it will be your specific requests for help that generate actions.

Ask for retweets. Ask for Facebook shares. Ask your email list to follow you. Ask people to forward your emails to their friends.

And when they do help, thank them. Send thank you messages to those who take the action you desire, whenever you know.

11. Measure your effectiveness

Last but not least, figure out what's working and do lots more of it.

This is the adage: first shoot bullets, then aim, then shoot cannons.

Beyond just the obvious tracking of how many people are on your lists, look to other evidence of engagement to see whether you're succeeding in turning your audience into an amplified voice.

And even beyond measuring their engagement, track effectiveness back the original rationale for why you're on social media on the first place. Close the loop on any plans generated under Tip 4 and then re-plan.

Disagree with something I wrote? Did I leave something out significant? Leave a comment or shoot me an email at jonathan@poisner.com.