10. Promotion and marketing

10.9 New and Social Media in the Voluntary Sector

What is 'new media'?

It is pretty much what it says it is; new forms of media that are used to get a message across to others via the internet.

What is 'social media'?

There are various definitions that can be found for social media, but simplistically it is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue. Whereas regular media is a one-way communication where you read a newspaper or listen to a report on television but you have very limited ability to give your thoughts on the matter, social media is a two-way conversation that gives you the ability to communicate too. 'New media' is utilised within social media.

Why would people in the voluntary sector need to use social media?

Those within the voluntary sector are often involved with campaigning, fundraising and service delivery, and they want to tell stories about the people they work with, the communities they are in and the issues that they are passionate about. They want to find and talk to people who can help them get change, deliver services or make a difference. Social media provides a new space that gives you the opportunity to do all of these things, and many nonprofit organisations are finding it to be an effective way to engage current supporters and reach new ones.

Brands, including charities, have always competed against each other for a share of the market; a share of consumers' attention and spending power. However, in a world where consumers are bombarded with more marketing messages every day, many charities are finding that tried and tested approaches are not working quite as well as they used to. This is probably set to continue as more and more people spend more time online and find the communities and resources that are available more and more indispensible to their day-to-day lives.

In light of this, the option of ignoring social media is not an advisable one. Most of the social media tools that are available are free of charge, so there is every reason to at least start trying them out because only then can you really start to figure out how they might work for your organisation.

Charities can use social media to promote their fundraising activities; to raise awareness of ongoing campaigns that are running; to engage consumers and educate them in the work that the charity does; to talk to people and answer their questions about the charity; ultimately, to make their voice heard. The good news is that some charities are already taking advantage of social networks (such as the NSPCC who have raised more than £10,000 through Facebook after setting up an application to allow users to make donations in 2007), but many have yet to realise the potential of social media.

Is it not enough just to have a website that people can use?

The problem is that everyone has a website, and differentiating yourself from the billions of websites that are online is becoming more challenging and expensive than ever before. Social media provides an avenue through which companies, organisations or individuals can fast-track themselves to getting noticed online. Forward-looking organisations understand that they need to be more flexible, and that they need to engage people in genuine dialogue rather than just broadcasting marketing messages at them. To do this they need to have a presence in the online social communities that their existing or potential supporters and stakeholders enjoy using.

So how do you choose the right social media tool for your organisation to use?

Like any marketing technique, different social media channels have different strengths, so it is critical to define your goals and audience in order to see effective results. There are various social media tools (which we will discuss shortly), but whatever you choose you will need to consider how to integrate the channels with your other communications in terms of tone, message, data and policies. The ideal is to create a strategy to reach as much of your targeted audience as possible, attracting and engaging supporters, and keeping them interested and informed. Remember, social media is not just a means to distribute one-sided requests or messages - it is a conversation - and if you want your supporters to contribute to that conversation you need to provide a facility that will encourage them to do that.

What new and social media tools are there to choose from?

There are new forms of social media being introduced all the time, but here are some of the most popular tools that you could choose from if you are looking to develop how you engage with your audience.

1. Facebook

Facebook is the leading social networking site based on monthly unique visitors, having over 500 million active users worldwide (as of January 2011). To put that in to perspective that is 1 in every 13 people on earth, and research shows that over half of those 500 million users are logged in on any given day!

It is free to use, and helps people keep in touch with extended groups of friends and family. Each person creates and maintains a profile, and can post updates — including photos or videos— of what they are doing or thinking. Their Facebook "friends," or people in their network, automatically see those updates and can comment on them, making for a great way to keep up with friends without much effort.

Voluntary organisations can create a Facebook Fan Page to allow people to follow their organisation in the same way, and post updates, links, conversations, photos, videos, petitions, or even make donations online. Facebook users who choose to "like" your organisation—essentially, list themselves as fans—see updates without needing to navigate to your page, and can get involved in discussions with other supporters. It is a way to bring your message to your supporters rather than trying to bring them to you.

'Facebook Connect' is a free tool that organisations can also utilise to enable Facebook users to log in to the organisation's website via their Facebook accounts. Users can then leave comments, have discussions, and post the link to the organisations' page directly to their news feeds through the plug-in. The links to the organisation's website will be seen on Facebook by the user's friends, who can then click through to the site because of the link.

More than 60 million Facebook users engage with Facebook Connect on external websites every month, and according to Facebook the tool increases traffic to sites and makes users up to 15-20 percent more active once they are on the organisation's site. This would suggest that if you are considering setting up a Facebook page for your group, it may well be worth installing Facebook Connect when you do so as the statistics speak for themselves!

Organisations who are already using Facebook have reported that it has been useful to them in the following ways:

- Increased feedback and discussion.
- Driving traffic to their website—and spreading information.
- Building an email list.
- Attracting event attendees.
- Getting people to take action.

- Attracting donations.

Perhaps the greatest thing about Facebook is that you do not need any technical skills to make and promote a great Page. Facebook provides you with all the tools, for free; you just have to know how to use them, and there is plenty of guidance online which can enable you to gain that knowledge.

2. Twitter

Twitter is a website that lets you create a (minimal) profile for your organisation for free, and send out a stream of short messages called "tweets" – these are updates about what you are doing, conversation starters, requests for help, or links to resources of interest.

Messages are limited to 140 characters or less - the maximum length of a text message on many phones. This is because many people send and receive tweets on their mobile phones, although you can also use the Twitter website. People can choose to "follow" your tweets, which is like subscribing to your feed, and if they particularly like one they can "retweet" it which means that they post it again so their own followers see it. It is in retweeting that much of the power of Twitter lies. If you post something interesting that is retweeted rapidly, you can reach a huge amount of people very quickly.

It is estimated that Twitter receives 180 million unique visitors every month, but it is a relatively specific group (generally older than those who typically use Facebook); this said, it is still an interesting way to reach media, partners and skilled potential volunteers, and at present Twitter is growing at a faster rate than Facebook is.

Nonprofit organisations who are using Twitter already have confirmed that they are finding Twitter useful — interestingly though, in different areas than other social media channels:

- Connecting with like-minded organisations.
- Connecting with the media.
- Asking questions.
- Engaging people with frequent updates
- Providing near-real-time updates.
- Coordinating a group in real time.

3. Blogs

Essentially, a 'blog' is an online diary where one or more people post fairly frequent updates (usually at least once a week) about what is going on in the organisation, told from a personal perspective. Technically, it is not that different from a website,

but the structure and tone tends to differentiate blogs — posts are often fairly short, appear in reverse chronological order (newest first), and are almost always written in the first person. Typically text-based, they can also include photos or videos.

It can be important to have a place that you can link to for more information and for follow-up, instead of sharing news or updates only in a brief tweet or Facebook message, and especially if it is just in an email newsletter. A blog can provide the space for sharing news, announcements, stories, and other information and let you re-share and distribute it all over the web.

Blogs are specifically useful in a few key areas:

- Publicizing your expertise
- Promoting your cause or educating people.
- Telling stories about your day-to-day work.
- Engaging people in your decisions, or your work, by encouraging a dialogue with and/or comments from them.
- Promoting your website and online information.
- Promoting events.

If you decide that you are interested in setting up a blog, one of the first things you will need to do is pick a 'platform' (provider) to use. You choose one based on the content that you want to use, and it is best to give it a try before you start promoting your blog, linking to it, and sharing it with the world. Some of the leading platforms you may want to consider include:

- WordPress (http://wordpress.com/)
- Tumblr (www.tumblr.com/)
- MovableType (www.movabletype.com/)
- Blogger (www.blogger.com/)
- Posterous (https://posterous.com/)
- TypePad (www.typepad.com/)

Examples of charities who are already blogging are:

- Red Cross - http://blogs.redcross.org.uk/
- Greenpeace - http://weblog.greenpeace.org/
- Oxfam - www.oxfam.org.uk/applications/blogs/pressoffice/?v=newsblog
- RSPCA - www.giveanimalsavoice.org.uk/blog/
- Dogs Trust - www.dogstrustblog.blogspot.com/

4. Podcasts

A podcast is like a radio broadcast, or programme, but without the need for radio. You make it as an MP3 and your audience can either download it from your website or from a digital media application such as iTunes.

A regular well-crafted podcast, with news and features, is a great way to promote the work that you are doing; think of it as an audio newsletter that your audience can receive regularly and automatically to MP3 players via their computers.

A podcast usually lasts around fifteen minutes, and could include an introduction with a trail ahead to a main feature, then a news section, followed by a radio package (feature) or interview. Any podcast could then be broken up into smaller parts and used elsewhere as part of your organisation's communications strategy, for example if you had an important interview in one podcast you could cut a shorter version of it and put it on the front page of your website.

5. Photo Sharing Websites

Imagery has always been a powerful method of communication, but until recently photographs have sometimes been rather awkward to handle online. This is no longer the case though, as with online photo-sharing sites you can manage your own photo library and also connect with other people's libraries to tell your stories in new ways.

The leading photo-sharing site is 'Flickr' (although there are other sites available too such as SmugMug or PhotoBucket), and a free account at Flickr lets you upload your digital photographs from your computer, by email or direct from your mobile phone. You can add titles, descriptions and keywords or tags to photographs, and arrange them into sets or albums and set the copyright on each image.

When your Flickr gallery is up and running, you can then use a simple piece of code to 'embed' the pictures on your site. Visitors to your site will see your images but you do not have to worry about hosting or arranging them. You can have a gallery on your site run for free by Flickr: this is not a substitute for a full website for your charity, but what it does is offer an easy point of access to collate your photos and to encourage user submissions.

Other ways to use photo sharing sites include:

- Getting (and displaying) photos from a distributed group.
- Finding people posting pictures of you.

6. Video Sharing Sites

With the advent of sites like 'YouTube' and 'Vimeo', the use of video is becoming more and more attractive to nonprofit organisations. A number of organisations have found that including a video as a part of a fundraising campaign can help to tell their story more passionately, helping to win over supporters of the appeal. Others are creating videos to educate advocates or clients.

YouTube is the second most popular social networking site in the UK, with over 2 billion people viewing it per day, and it can allow you to create a branded channel on their site or embed videos on your own website. If you are a registered UK charity you can get a nonprofit-specific You-Tube account, which provides more features — such as the ability to add clickable asks on top of videos— and lets you upload longer videos.

Vimeo is another very popular video sharing site, having over 15 million unique visitors per month and an average of more than 16,000 new videos uploaded daily. It works in a similar way to YouTube, with its facility for embedding videos on to your own website being particularly popular.

Videos have interesting potential as social media, for instance:

- Encouraging conversation around videos as people can comment on them.
- Spreading the word about what is in the video, by supporters passing it on to their friends and family.
- Asking constituents to 'vote your videos' up (those videos that are viewed and liked by a lot of people are more likely to be shown on category pages, which will then create more views for you, so if your supporters view your videos a number of times the videos are more likely to be shown on category pages).
- Asking supporters to provide videos.
- Hosting a video channel if you have access to a lot of video, or interest in compiling video about your issues.

Should you just use one social media tool?

No, not necessarily. Choosing social media tools is not an either/or situation; it is a question of finding the right mix of channels for your needs. It is critical to have a good, integrated strategy that defines what tools to use for specific needs, and how often they are implemented or updated. You need to think of each tool as part of an overall communications strategy which focuses on your audience and your goals. In order to figure out the ideal mix that makes the best use of your time, devote some thought to three variables:

(i)   staff time (as a rule of thumb set aside at least two hours each week for every social media channel in your mix);

(ii)   existing resources (consider what skills your staff have already and how those skills can best be utilised via the social media options available);

(iii)   overall timing (different social media tools work in different timeframes, with some requiring very regular updates and others less so, which means you have to choose the right tool for your particular campaign at a given time).

What else do you need to consider before starting to use social media?

- Make sure you have the time to use the social media tool(s) that you choose.

  There is no point in prioritising a presence on YouTube if you do not have the time to create engaging video content, or setting up a Twitter profile or a blog if you do not have time to post frequently. Equally if your organisation already creates a lot of video content, a YouTube channel could be perfect for you as it will represent a fairly low-maintenance way of creating a social presence that can be linked to content on other platforms later, or to groups that your supporters may have set up on Facebook, for example.

  Wherever you decide it makes sense to have a presence, you need to be able to make a commitment to posting and sharing content fairly regularly. If you actively engage people anywhere through a social platform your absence will be noticed and commented on if you suddenly disappear from the landscape. The rewards should far outweigh this responsibility though, so do not let that stop you getting involved in social media that is available to you.

- Ensure you are aware of the legal issues that you may need to consider.

  It is important that organisations explore social media and its benefits, but when doing so there are legal issues that need to be considered such as:

  (i)   Right clearances (before uploading any content on to your website, blog etc the necessary clearances must be obtained from the intellectual property right owners)

  (ii)   Infringement of third party rights (although user generated content is an effective way to engage with the public, there is a risk that the material posted will breach other peoples' rights, so you need to produce clear Terms of Use regulating users' participation in the website).

(iii)   Privacy (where personal information is provided by users, it is important that data protection legislation is complied with).

Further information

The following sources can provide you with further information on different social media tools, which tool(s) may be best for your organisation, how to use them, and so on:

- *Idealware '*Nonprofit Social Media Decision Guide' which walks you through a step-by-step process to decide what social media channels make sense for your organization via a workbook, guide, and research results: www.idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/Idealware_SocialMedia_DecisionGuide_3.pdf

- *KnowHow NonProfit* 'how-to' guides on various social media tools: www.knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/ugc_search?ugctags=social%20media

- *MediaTrust* guides on various digital resources: http://resources.mediatrust.org/digital/

- *NCVO* guide 'How to use new media': www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/NewMediaCaseStudies2008.pdf

- *Institute of Fundraising* Code of Practice for fundraising through electronic media: www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk/Resources/Institute%20of%20Fundraising/Codes/Fundraising%20through%20Electronic%20Media%20-%20CHECK.pdf

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