WEB 2.0 THE SOCIAL WEB

Getting Started with Social Media

Web 2.0 Has Changed Online Communications and Fundraising Forever

The launch of Friendster in 2002 and then LinkedIn and Myspace in 2003 began a fundamental shift in how people and nonprofits use the Internet. The Web began to make the transition from being static to being social. In 2004 came Flickr, and then YouTube in 2005—forever changing the way we view and share photos and video. Facebook left its birthplace in higher education and opened to the masses in 2006, a defining moment that gave rise to the largest social network thus far in the Web’s short history. In the same year, Twitter began to tweet. By the time Foursquare and Gowalla hit the Web and mobile devices in 2009, nonprofit communication and online fundraising campaigns were completely unrecognizable compared to what they had been just five years previously.

Today, we’re all still learning and improving with each status update, tweet, and check-in. Thankfully, our mistakes are most often forgiven by our friends, followers, and fans, and our successes are increasingly “Liked” and “Retweeted.” The Social Web is more casual in style and tone, and more personal in its ability to connect individuals and nonprofits with similar causes, concerns, and passions. When combined with the knowledge and power of our Web 1.0 campaigns, social media helped us finally begin to reach the full potential of the Internet for social good. The blogosphere often touts the successes of the business sector in social media, but it was the nonprofit sector that led the way by launching Myspace Profiles and YouTube Channels in 2005, Facebook Groups in 2006, and Twitter Profiles in 2007. We are leaders in this communications revolution. Now, almost six years into using social media for social good, nonprofits collectively have the knowledge and experience to transform our sector, the Web, and philanthropy.

Before You Get Started, Get Organized

The successful implementation of social media for your nonprofit requires forethought and planning. Some of the decisions you make early on will affect your social media campaigns for years. Make sure they are the right ones. Too many nonprofits have rushed in without proper training or know-how, and unfortunately have learned later on that they’ve made many mistakes—some of which cannot be rectified. Whether you’ve been using social media for years, months, or days or you have yet to get started, the information and strategies in this chapter can save you a lot of time and frustration.

1. Define Your Goals and Objectives
To lay a strong foundation for the successful long-term branding of your nonprofit on the Social Web, you need to define your primary goals and objectives. Are you using social media primarily to raise money? To secure new volunteers? To increase your website traffic? To build your online brand? To foster social good and create social change? Take an hour or two and write down five to ten goals and objectives. This will help you stay focused and give you a baseline against which you can monitor your progress.
2. Define Your Metrics and Create a Social Media ROI Spreadsheet
Once you have defined your goals and objectives, create a social media ROI spreadsheet to monitor and report your progress from month to month. In the far left column of the spreadsheet, list the metrics that you want to monitor. Next, create 12 columns for the 12 months. Finally, pick a day of the month to begin and enter the baseline metrics for the first month, then enter your progress for that month on the same day of every month thereafter. Some common metrics to monitor are website traffic, blog traffic, e-newsletter subscribers, Facebook fans, Twitter followers, online dollars raised, volunteers, and event attendees. If your nonprofit is on the right track with social media, then you'll notice an increase in the metrics from month to month over time. If not, then your social media strategy is missing something.

3. Create a Google Account and Set Up Google Alerts
The need to have a Google account will come up many times in your social media and mobile technology campaigns. Go to “google.com/accounts > Create an account.” During the sign-up process, you’ll want to choose a username (such as nonprofitorgs) that matches the URLs of both your website and your social networking communities because it becomes both your profile vanity URL (google.com/profiles/nonprofitorgs) and your Gmail account (nonprofitorgs@gmail.com).
Next, once you’ve set up your new Google account, sign up to receive Google Alerts via e-mail on a daily basis at google.com/alerts. Fill out a query to search “everything” for your nonprofit’s name and acronym. You do not need a Google account to receive Google Alerts, but you do need one to manage them. Also, as you’ll see in Chapter 5, you will need a Google account to set up a YouTube Channel properly. Google offers an incredible range of products (google.com/options) that you are likely to experiment with in coming years, so a Google account is a must for any nonprofit.

4. Be Consistent When Reserving Vanity URLs
Consistency in vanity URLs is important for print materials, e-newsletters, and e-signatures (facebook.com/nonprofitorgs, twitter.com/nonprofitorgs, youtube.com/nonprofitorgs, and so on), although if your nonprofit is just getting started with social media, then you may have some trouble reserving your first choice of vanity URLs because there’s a good chance that it has already been taken. Ideally, your social media vanity URLs should match your website URL, but if your website URL is not available on the big three (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), then you may need to get creative. For example, the Latin America Work Group’s website is www.lawg.org, but when the organization was setting up its profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, “lawg” was not available on all three sites. So, it went with “lawgaction” instead (facebook.com/lawgaction, twitter.com/lawgaction, and youtube.com/lawgaction).

To find out whether the URLs of your choice are available, simply enter your preferred vanity URLs in your Web browser. If you get a message that says, “That page cannot be found,” that means that the URL is available. It’s worth noting that in most cases you will not be able to change social media URLs at a later date, so put some serious thought into these URLs before reserving them.
For organizational reasons, you could opt to use the Gmail e-mail account that you created for your nonprofit when setting up your Google account for all social media and mobile technology accounts. It will help you centralize all your efforts and reduce the amount of spam and notification e-mails sent to your work e-mail account. However, if you do opt to use your Gmail e-mail account, protect it fiercely. Go to “Gmail > Settings > Accounts and Import > Grant access to your account” and add an additional staff person (he must have a Gmail e-mail account) to prevent losing access to all your social media and mobile technology profiles and accounts in a worst-case scenario. That said, if you decide to use Gmail e-mail as your login hub, then it is best to not give interns or volunteers access.

5. Save Usernames and Passwords in a Secure Place
Create a master login sheet. Using a Word or Excel document, create a list of all the usernames, passwords, and vanity URLs for your social media and mobile technology accounts. Make sure that key staff members at your nonprofit have access to the document and that it is saved securely.

6. Use a Square Version of Your Organization’s Logo as Your Avatar on Social Media Sites
It’s very important that you invest the time and resources needed to designing a visually distinct, square avatar that matches the overall branding of your nonprofit. Since most nonprofit logos are horizontal, they cannot be used as your avatar on social media sites because they are automatically cropped once they are uploaded. Would you ever put a cropped logo on your website, in your e-mail newsletter, or in print materials? Of course not! Yet every day, nonprofits are sending out hundreds of thousands of tweets and status updates with completely wrecked logos. To begin branding your nonprofit on social media sites properly, start with an avatar that is a square version of your logo. After a year or so of building the brand recognition of your avatar, you can then switch and rotate square photos as avatars to spark curiosity and add variety, as long as they include a smaller version of your logo somewhere in the avatar.

7. Learn Basic HTML
Basic knowledge of Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) will make or break your social media campaigns. To add images to your blog, create custom tabs on Facebook, and/or design an e-newsletter template, you need to know basic HTML code. HTML allows you to format text and insert links and images on Web pages. Take a class or sit down for a few hours with a tutorial, just make sure that your learn basic HTML!

8. Experiment with Social Media Dashboards
HootSuite is a Web-based social media dashboard service that allows you to update and monitor Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, LinkedIn, and WordPress from one dashboard. You can schedule tweets and status updates in advance (ideal for nonprofits with international audiences), easily monitor trending topics, and get access to useful statistics about your brand and its buzz on the Social Web in real time. HootSuite also offers numerous apps, making it compatible with most smartphones and tablets. People who use social media dashboards tend to acclimate and convert for the long term. In fact, more than half of all Twitterers use a third-party dashboard tool to manage their Twitter campaigns. These tools can be incredibly useful and innovative, but make sure that you commit to not wrapping yourself in a HootSuite bubble.
These tools are designed for marketers, and sometimes users can lose touch with how their individual supporters experience Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, and other sites—which is by logging into each site individually. If you are going to use a tool like HootSuite regularly, take a break every so often. You should also never automate content using these tools, or spam each community with the same message. Every social networking community has its own unique ebb and flow, and your supporters have no interest in liking, following, or friending a robot. While these tools can help you streamline your social media campaigns, they have made poor social media managers of many. That said, other well-known social media dashboard tools include TweetDeck, Threadsy, Seesmic, and CoTweet.

9. Get Buy-in from Executive Staff

For many nonprofits, getting the green light to use social media, and, more important, to invest the time and resources necessary to launch and maintain a successful social media campaign, is unfortunately still much easier said than done. This is where the age divide often becomes blatantly obvious. Many older executive staff members just don’t get social media. They are deeply entrenched and often stuck in the era of Web 1.0—much to the frustration of some of their younger colleagues. The reality is that social media is no longer new. Many nonprofits are entering their sixth or seventh year of using social media. If your nonprofit is still on the fence about social media, then it is dangerously close to becoming dysfunctional in terms of online communication and fund-raising. Tell your boss that. Show her the stats. Research how other nonprofits with missions and programs similar to yours are using social media, and then let the executive staff clearly know that your nonprofit is falling behind. Be persistent. Social media is not a fad. It is a fundamental shift in how people use the Internet for social good. Failing to participate in the Social Web will be detrimental to your nonprofit in the long term.

10. Create a Simple Media Policy

An organization’s social media policy should provide basic guidelines to staff members and volunteers about what is appropriate to post on social media sites, an overview of privacy and legal issues, and some general rules about using social media during office hours. The overall message should be one of empowerment, not control and restriction. Keep it simple and on the short side. Focus on the big picture and create guidelines that can be applied across many social media tools, such as

- Commit to high standards of professionalism when representing the organization online. Our goal is to build online communities in order to share our expertise and better serve our mission and programs.
- Be respectful and polite at all times—even during online disagreements.
- Delete content that is off-topic or inappropriate in character. When in doubt, get a second opinion.
- Link to online references and source material often.
- Acknowledge mistakes quickly.
- Be honest and authentic.
- Engage in conversation.
- Think before you post, and make sure that your content is accurate and factual.
- Share only content that is meant for public consumption. Don’t discuss programs or campaigns that have not yet been officially launched to the public.
- Personal use of social media during breaks is allowed, but use of social media for work purposes must be approved first.
- Enjoy yourself! If you are not having fun engaging in online communities on behalf of the organization, then don’t do it. Social media is not for every personality type.
11. Follow Large Organizations with Mission and Programs Similar to Yours

Large nonprofits usually have the resources to experiment, hire consultants, and get extensive training on what works and what doesn’t. Follow those whose mission and programs are similar to yours, and mimic their work. Nonprofits like Amnesty International, PETA, the American Cancer Society, the Sierra Club, and the Susan G. Komen for the Cure excel in online communication. Learn from them. Study their websites and blogs. Experience their online donation process. Subscribe to their e-newsletters. Like them on Facebook. Follow them on Twitter. Almost every action that these nonprofits take online is for a good reason. They know what works and what doesn’t, they are constantly innovating and experimenting, and they are usually one or two steps ahead of most other nonprofits.

That said, have realistic expectations. Don’t expect the same results from social media that the large nonprofits have. Their brands are well known and much loved. They usually have enormous e-newsletter lists and multiple communications staff members. For those reasons, large nonprofits have a huge advantage on the Social Web, but you can duplicate their success on a smaller scale.

About the Author

Heather Mansfield is the owner of DIOSA Communications, principal blogger at Nonprofit Tech 2.0, and author of Social Media for Social Good: A How-To Guide for Nonprofits. She also created and maintains the “Nonprofit Organizations” profiles on Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Foursquare, which cumulatively have more than 500,000 Friends, Followers, and Fans. A pioneer in utilizing social media for the nonprofit sector, Heather has fifteen years of experience utilizing the Internet for fundraising, community-building, and advocacy. To date, she’s presented more than 100 social media and mobile technology trainings throughout the United States and over 500 webinars to audiences worldwide.

Heather’s career in web and e-mail communications first received national recognition when she launched her own eActivist.org in July 2000. She spoke at conferences throughout the United States and built one of the most popular e-activism websites on the Internet.

In 2004, after years of living on small nonprofit salaries in expensive big cities, Heather returned to her hometown of Springfield, MO and began working remotely as the Nonprofit Community Manager for Change.org. Shortly thereafter she launched DIOSA Communications and delved into the online metropolis of MySpace (myspace.com/nonprofitorganizations) in 2006. Since then, she has become one of the leading experts on how nonprofit organizations can also use Twitter (@nonprofitorgs), Facebook (facebook.com/nonprofitorgs), YouTube (youtube.com/nonprofitorgs), LinkedIn, Flickr (flickr.com/nonprofitorgs), Foursquare (foursquare.com/nonprofitorgs), WordPress (nonprofitorgs.wordpress.com), and mobile technology to advance their online communications and development strategies.

In 2009, she was added to Twitter’s much-coveted “Suggested User List” and named a “Fundraising Star of the Year” by Fundraising Success Magazine. Additionally, Heather was named one of the “12 People You Need to Know in 2011” by her hometown Springfield Business Journal. Her grandparents, Ray and Wanella, would be very proud – and are sorely missed.