

Engage Donors with Social Media

If you're not using these strategies, you're missing one of the best ways to connect with donors and prospects.

By John Clese

Most likely you're already using social media as a fundraising strategy, or thinking about it. With over one billion people on Facebook, 100 million on Twitter, and 150 million professionals connecting on LinkedIn, organizations would be remiss to ignore this social reality.

We know that a large majority of people now interact with their personal connections and professional networks through a variety of Web-based and mobile social networks, as well as online blogs, gaming platforms, and community forums. Not only are people communicating, playing, and working on these networks, but they can choose their interactions based on what is relevant to them — where they live, who they know, what their interests are, and what their priorities are in the moment.

What does that mean for nonprofits and donor-based organizations that want to stay engaged on many levels with their donors? Social media tools provide powerful opportunities to send your donor engagement soaring, thanks to the natural connections arising out of posting, sharing, linking, and “liking.” To make the most of these new opportunities for developing a dialogue with your donors and boosting their feelings of loyalty to your organization, you need to develop a clear strategy.

A “social” donor engagement strategy goes far beyond throwing a page up on Facebook or Twitter or posting daily on LinkedIn or Pinterest. We know now that social media tools need to be used thoughtfully and strategically. By “listening,” measuring, and analyzing social data, you can develop a clear picture of your donors' views that is accurate and actionable. This holistic method of data collection is the basis of “Social” Constituent Relationship Management (CRM).

Just as traditional CRM systems have been used to manage an organization's relationships with donors through data gathering and analysis, campaign automation, and customer support, a comprehensive Social CRM strategy is essential to integrate and evaluate social data. Social data offer valuable feedback that can help inform future decisions about brand-building, recruitment, retention, and messaging. With the right tools and tactics, and an organization-wide, donor-centric philosophy, you can use your Social CRM to develop a more complete understanding of your donors, which in turn can inform decisions that drive long-term loyalty and increased engagement.

So, where do you start?

1. MANAGE THE DONOR LIFECYCLE USING SOCIAL DATA.

Traditionally, a donor lifecycle is very linear and reactive. It's based on measurable transactions such as registering for an event, sending an annual contribution, or downloading a report. But now, with social media, you can engage and interact in real time. A donor may not respond to e-mails but may be a fan on Facebook or a Twitter follower.

By gathering and analyzing this social information, you can begin to engage with your donors in an ongoing, meaningful, relevant way.

2. INCREASE PARTICIPATION WITH AN ONLINE COMMUNITY.

While it's important to meet donors where they are online, it's even more essential to embrace the passion your donors have for your organization and cause. A private, dedicated online community offers an opportunity to focus participation in ways an open network (such as Facebook) cannot. You control the look and feel, the messaging, and the access. You can observe, analyze, and sometimes steer the conversation to resolve issues or share new ways for donors to give back, perhaps through volunteering or becoming annual or major donors.

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Social-Media Roundup

The following resources at www.NonprofitWorld.org/ members will help you flesh out your social-media strategies:

How to Make Social-Media Fundraising Work for You (Vol. 27, No. 2)

Benefits & Risks for Nonprofit Leaders Using LinkedIn (Vol. 31, No. 2)

Using Social Media to Advance Your Goals (Vol. 27, No. 1)

Reach New Supporters with Multichannel Tools (Vol. 29, No. 2)

Accelerating Fundraising through Social Media (Vol. 28, No. 3)

The Peer-to-Peer Fundraising Evolution (Vol. 30, No. 6)

How to Measure Online Fundraising Success (Vol. 26, No. 1)

Hearing Donors' Third Voice (Vol. 29, No. 3)

Free Webinar Recording for Members: Principles of Social Media Strategy. This webinar will help you use social media to spread your messages, attract new people, and increase awareness of your brand.

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3. OFFER A BETTER WAY TO NETWORK.

Being invited to join a dedicated, donor-only community can be considered a significant benefit by a donor — a value-added experience. Here, the relationship is not just between you and your donors but between the donors themselves, creating not just a dialogue between the constituents and the organization but a layered, multi-directional communication environment. Communication in this environment becomes personal and relevant to your donor’s specific interests.


4. MONITOR THE CONVERSATION.

The value of hearing what your donors are saying is critical to your organization’s future. When you listen to social comments and interactions, you can personalize your responses. Whether the conversations are peer-to-peer or donor-to-organization doesn’t matter — you still need to know about them to respond in the most relevant way. Think about people who complain on Twitter or Facebook to their peers. They often post their frustrations to their friends and connections rather than going straight to the organization. If you’re effectively monitoring those discussions on your own social network or a public one, then you can respond appropriately and in real time. Also, if someone reaches out to your organization through social media, you want to be there to meet their needs and then keep track of and analyze those interactions going forward.

5. AUTOMATE AND MEASURE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT.

The sheer volume of social data and the vast amount of social sources can seem overwhelming when it comes to measurement and analysis. Luckily, software exists to consolidate all that donor information into a single dashboard and produce a single “engagement score” based on qualitative and quantitative analysis. Using such software, you can trigger and automate appropriate responses and campaigns to handle various donor questions, problems, and communications. The result will be boosted efficiency, cost savings, and freed-up staff time and resources.

Feel the power.

Use these five tips to leverage the “power of one.” Today’s social donor technology gives you the power to monitor and interact socially with donors, then consolidate and measure social data, combine it with traditional CRM data, and turn it into personalized, relevant, measurable, and actionable information. 

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