

Wow People with Your Digital Material

High-quality digital content is scarce. That's why you can be a hero by providing it.



By Victoria Flood

Everyone today is overwhelmed with a surplus of information. They're hungry for ways to sort what's useless from what's meaningful. That's where you come in. Become a trusted messenger for people, and they'll become avid supporters.

Content marketing—promoting your mission by offering educational, free, valuable content online—lets you do more with less. According to fundraising software maker Blackbaud, 92% of nonprofit professionals use content marketing to some degree, and they're producing more content each year. As digital content marketing becomes a standard practice, there's a risk that audiences may feel "content fatigue." It's important to develop strategies that help your content stand out from the noise.

Create Online Content that People Can Trust

Use these tactics to develop high-quality content:

Enlist Guest Contributors

Consider using external sources, such as featured bloggers, luminaries, guest speakers, and notable members, to provide some of your online content. Outside experts bring both credibility and an established audience. Guest contributors extend the reach of your messages and deliver new audiences to your online content. A number of successful nonprofits use this strategy. AARP, for example, frequently invites guests to contribute to its blog and share their advice.

Let Your Staff's Passion Drive the Content

Using your staff's commitment to the mission and asking team members for editorial ideas are great ways to generate content. Ask your staff to contribute to blog posts, white papers, e-books, newsletters, and other communications. They're a great source of authentic content that will inspire action. And letting your supporters get to know your staff will engage them with your mission and message.

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Consider Part-time Writers

To avoid the expense of hiring a full-time employee who has deep knowledge of a subject, you can reach out to experts who can write on a part-time basis. Many writers will tailor their work to your needs while injecting a valuable external perspective.

Focus on Highly “Sharable” Content

Social sharing increases the reach of your message exponentially. High-quality content has the potential to generate a lot of shares, and visual content—videos and infographics in particular—tends to be shared the most. There are many low-cost tools for creating and distributing visual content. For example, you can use www.infogr.am to make infographics at a fraction of what you'd pay to hire a designer.

Share the Right Content with the Right Audience

Once you've created engaging content, it's critical to tailor your messages to the proper audiences. Here are some useful strategies:

Engage and Advertise with Social Media

Social media offers an inexpensive—and often free—way to disseminate content to large audiences. However, it's important to have a strategy in place before launching a social media campaign. After evaluating your diverse stakeholder groups' use of social media, analyze your target audience to determine which platforms suit your goals. For example, individual donors may be best reached through Facebook, while corporate sponsors may be more active on LinkedIn. Instagram is useful if your organization has plenty of visual content, while LinkedIn is better for sharing scholarly publications.

More and more nonprofits are advertising on social media through promoted tweets, Facebook ads, and LinkedIn ads. Such advertising is an excellent way to both reach target audiences *and* measure the effectiveness of shared content. Create an ad around a particular piece of content—a white paper or video, for example—and set a budget. Then measure how many clicks, donations, or shares you receive. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn offer analytics on the type of person who engages with the content, allowing you to see whom you're reaching and how well your content performs.

Take Advantage of Low-Cost Tools for Nonprofits

A number of software and online applications offer reduced-cost content dissemination tools specifically designed for nonprofits. YouTube's nonprofit program, for example, lets

you collect donations directly from your YouTube channel. (Take a look at www.youtube.com/nonprofits.) Google Grants offers eligible nonprofits a \$10,000-per-month Google AdWords budget. Some e-mail marketing platforms (such as VerticalResponse, www.verticalresponse.com/pricing/non-profit/application) offer nonprofits a limited number of free e-mail sends per month, and major brands like Constant Contact will discount their products for nonprofits.

Maximize the Impact of Small Teams

Keeping digital content central to your marketing strategy is the key to making the biggest impact with minimal resources. Some pointers:

Track ROI Closely

Measuring ROI (return on your investment) using digital marketing platforms is far easier than doing so with traditional marketing methods. Most digital marketing platforms have built-in analytics that help you measure success. For each initiative, you should be tracking:

- **conversion rate:** donations, memberships, registrations, etc., that you can attribute to a marketing communication
- **engagement rate:** number of opens, clicks, and shares
- **unsubscribe or opt-out rate.**

After you've measured the ROI of specific campaigns, tailor your future efforts accordingly. Doing so will keep you from focusing limited resources on unsuccessful strategies.

Automate Wisely

Marketing automation can save small, overworked teams a great deal of time. Because of advancements in marketing software and cloud-based tools, you can now automate your e-mail and social media campaigns. Customer relationship management (CRM) tools, like Salesforce, Zoho, and Eloqua, require an up-front investment but offer time-saving benefits. They allow for mass mailings, automated thank-you notes, and user-friendly list management. Additionally, their reporting capabilities provide insights into your target audience—data that would require massive resources if pulled together manually.

Consider Supplementing Staff with Consultants

If your team feels stretched too thin, it may be efficient to look externally for marketing resources. A qualified consultant can ramp up marketing initiatives more quickly than team members who are already working at capacity. Consultants can bring successful practices from other organizations and a fresh perspective. 

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