

Exercising Board Leadership with Social Media

Board members can make a huge impact through social media. All it takes is a few minutes a day.



By Marion Conway

It has always been your responsibility as a board member to be an ambassador for your organization, introduce friends to the organization, and invite friends to fundraising events. That hasn't changed. But the 21st century brings some new ways of doing these things.

Whether you are 21 or 81 — the age range of 99% of board members — chances are you participate in some form of social media. Social media is a powerful tool for nonprofits today and even many small nonprofits have a staff member or volunteer toiling away to maintain a social media presence for their organization. This presence can be enhanced immeasurably — in many cases multiplying current impact by 10 to 20 times, or more — if you and the rest of the board take some very simple steps with the social media you already use. Adding to the benefit: Using social media is one way you can exercise your board leadership responsibility.

Use social media to:

- **Demonstrate passion** for the cause
- **Be an ambassador** to the community
- **Lead in spirit — passing along** the covenant with your nonprofit to others

Nonprofits engage social media today to accomplish a lot. Among the purposes, to:

- Engage existing supporters
- Find potential new friends, including donors and advocates
- Find volunteers
- Find people who are interested in attending your events
- Identify potential board members
- Build better relationships with not only all of the above groups of people, but the community as a whole
- Educate the community
- Get donations

It's important to note that getting donations — the reason of most interest to almost everyone — comes later, only after you have successfully done all the other things.

“Tagging is a modern way to show recognition.”

But never fear; you and the other members of your board can help achieve some or all of these social media goals by just incorporating the promotion of your nonprofit into whatever you already do with social media.

Let me be clear. I am not talking about asking your friends to give money online. Though, if you feel comfortable doing that, by all means go ahead. What I am talking about is how you can be an ambassador online just by tweaking — a very little bit — what you already do. Here are six possibilities:

1. Become a Facebook Fan

Your nonprofit probably has a Facebook page. But it may not have a lot of activity or visitors, since very few people will go directly to its site. The real value to a nonprofit of having a Facebook page is to have the page come up in people's newsfeed. Here are a few things you as a board member can do to make that happen and increase its visibility.

“LIKE” THE ORGANIZATION'S PAGE

An organization's page is different than a friend's page, and getting people to “like” the page takes some effort. Twenty-five people must like it before the nonprofit can claim the name facebook.com/nameofnonprofitpage and promote it. Once you have this URL, the page will come up in search engines — and the Facebook page may very well get better placement in searches than your Web site.

“LIKE” COMMENTS, AND COMMENT ON THE PAGE'S POSTS

The only way most people will see what is posted on the organization's wall is if it comes up in their newsfeed. Many people see “highlighted stories” first — rather than “most recent stories.”

The highlighted stories filter out lots of recent stories. A post is much more likely to be in the highlighted posts' feed if it has “likes” and comments.

If just three board members click the “like” button on a wall post, it will greatly enhance the chances of the post appearing in more people's newsfeed. Comments and “likes” also cause people to read the entry and join the conversation.

Engaging people in conversation is an important opportunity that Facebook provides, but just as at a cocktail party, someone must start the conversation. You can be that person. I routinely respond to a nonprofit's wall postings by clicking the “like” button or commenting on events I attended. It takes seconds and can help that nonprofit's visibility in newsfeeds a great deal. It also can be a conversation starter.

“ Ask people to donate rather than give you a gift for your birthday. ”

INITIATE POSTS ON THE ORGANIZATION'S WALL

Facebook pages are boring when only one person posts. The page needs to have different voices to make it attractive. So... initiate posts. It is so simple. Here are some examples:

- I am really looking forward to going to the ABC Nonprofit's Fall Fundraiser. They are honoring Joe Smith this year and he really deserves it. Do you know Joe? Would you like to sit at a table with me? Let me know.
- Wow! I had a great time at the Reading Festival for kids in Newark hosted by XYZ Nonprofit. I am on the board and I volunteered for the day. The kids really enjoyed the event. There were so many interactive things for them to do. It was all about literacy, the arts, and having fun. I just love being part of this organization.

INITIATE POSTS ON YOUR OWN WALL

You can take the same comments and post them on your own wall. This may cause some people who see your posts in their newsfeed to check out the organization's page and "like" the page. It is my experience that when I post about nonprofits with which I'm involved, the posts get "likes" and comments. This tells me that my friends enjoy seeing these brief updates of what I'm doing with these nonprofits.

POST PICTURES

Did you attend an event and take pictures? Post them on Facebook — on both your wall and the organization's wall. Tag them (identify the people in the picture) on the nonprofit's wall.

On your own page, click on "photos" and then on the specific picture that you want to tag someone in. Click on "tag photo" and click back on the photo. Move the cursor to the person you want to tag. A text box will pop up. As you begin to enter the person's name, a suggested list of your friends will appear and you can just click on the right person on the list. Click on "done tagging" and you're all set.

When you tag someone on your Facebook page, it will show up on the person's Facebook page as well. It is a modern way to show recognition.

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These are a few very simple ways that you can use Facebook to be an ambassador for your nonprofit. It only takes a few minutes a week. And just think, if 10 people do one of these things once a week, your nonprofit's Facebook page could become a strong relationship-building tool.

Another hidden value to board members engaging on Facebook is the morale-builder and encouragement it gives the page administrator and staff. Staff members often feel removed from the board. The board's reputation with staff can take a rewarding leap forward if board members are engaged on Facebook.

No matter how large or small your organization, if you have a Facebook page but are failing to achieve the relationships with supporters you desire, you have the ability to make a difference. Catapult this friend-raising tool to a much higher level in just minutes a day.

**2. Be Active on LinkedIn**

LinkedIn has become an important resource for nonprofits. You can use it to give positive exposure to you, personally, and to your nonprofit. A few ways:

**UPDATE YOUR PROFILE**

One profile category in LinkedIn is Volunteer Experience & Causes. You can enhance your personal profile and give some exposure to your organization by updating your profile to include your board service.

**UPDATE YOUR STATUS**

You can update your status to show activities you are involved with at your nonprofit. Updating your status can serve to keep both your name and your nonprofit's name in the minds of your business friends — especially when you include a link to the nonprofit's Web site. It is a win-win situation. And, if you link your LinkedIn and Twitter accounts, you can just click on the Twitter bird that pops up to automatically update in Twitter also.

**PROSPECT FOR NEW DONORS, VOLUNTEERS, AND BOARD MEMBERS**

Use "search" and "advanced search" to find people who have particular professions, went to your university, or work in certain industries or companies who may be a good match for your organization. For example, perhaps you would like to have someone with financial experience on your board. One way to find such a person is to search on a keyword and in, or near, a specific zip code. I tried this with the word finance and my zip code. People in my network appeared first, followed by others with finance in their profile in my general geographic area.

The rewards are great. You just might find some good prospects to invite to an event, ask for a contribution, or cultivate to serve on the board.

**3. Use Twitter**

I love Twitter and am active on it. I enjoy being part of a vibrant nonprofit online community and learning about incredible opportunities, great resources, and events.

Twitter is particularly wonderful for advocacy. If advocacy is one of your nonprofit's roles, board members who are on Twitter should use their 140 characters to get the word out. Make sure you use relevant hashtags (#), and you will see lots of new followers.

Hashtags are a very useful tool for getting the most out of Twitter, because they allow people to search for tweets around a topic they're interested in, for instance boards. Ever see a word or a phrase in a tweet that has a # prefix? That's a hashtag.

“ A good time to post is during a specific campaign, or at the holiday season. ”

To help your board members attract followers for their tweets, encourage them to pick no more than two key words or phrases to highlight with a hashtag. These may be something generic like #nonprofit, or refer to a specific event such as #relayforlife. Notice that if you want to tag a phrase, you don't use any spaces between the words. The hashtags can be used anywhere in the Twitter message. People who click on a hashtag will see other messages that have highlighted the same word or phrase. So you may want to provide your board members with a couple key hashtags to use.

Hashtags are also often used by people at learning events such as conferences and workshops. They provide a means of sharing information with other participants and those who couldn't attend. They can be used to facilitate group discussions, because everyone posting uses the same hashtag, and participants search/follow that

hashtag. I enjoy participating in conferences by tweeting with the hashtag for the conference.

Start to notice the hashtags in tweets of people you follow. Click on them and you are sure to find whole threads of interest, and new people to follow.

## 4. Leave Comments on Blogs

Do you read blogs related to the work of your nonprofit, or perhaps its issues? Be sure to leave comments when you do, and include mention of your organization. People who are interested in the article and comments will see yours, and if what you wrote has a link to your organization, they may just click and visit the Web site. We call this driving traffic to the Web site. It's a good thing!

## 5. Add to Your Web Site

Do you have a Web site — either personal or small business? Include your board membership in your biography and have a link to the nonprofit's Web site in the bio. If appropriate, post a small “ad” for your nonprofit's events.

## 6. “Pin” on Pinterest

At the time of this writing, Pinterest is the fastest growing social media site. It is perfect for people who like visuals because, essentially, it is a cluster of online bulletin boards. And, it is simple and easy to use. If you don't have an account, consider getting one.

### PINTEREST EXAMPLE

Check out this link to my Pinterest page where you can see several “boards” related to nonprofit topics: [pinterest.com/marionconway](http://pinterest.com/marionconway)

Once you have a Pinterest account — which you can associate with your Facebook account — you can easily “pin” visuals on a board. This is a great way to cover an event or a program. Supply a brief description of your images, and then invite people on Facebook to visit your Pinterest board. When people click on the link at your Facebook page, they are sent right to your Pinterest board, where, on a single page, are all the pictures from that event or program. It is a very user-friendly format. Since you can have multiple boards, it is best to have all the visuals on any single board about a common topic.

## Are You Ready to Make the Ask with Social Media?

Once you've introduced your networks to your nonprofit, they will know that this organization is important to you. Only after you have established this fact should you consider the “get donations” phase of using social media as a board member. Here are some ways to take your social media networks to the next level.

### DRAW PEOPLE TO YOUR NONPROFIT'S E-NEWSLETTER & DONATION PAGE

Post the link to your organization's e-newsletter and Web site donation page on Facebook and Twitter. Every nonprofit Web site and e-newsletter should have “donate now” capability. A good time to post is during a specific campaign, or at the holiday season. As an example, a status update might read: “Will you join me in sending kids in Newark to camp this summer? ABC Nonprofit, where I am on the board, makes this happen.” Be sure the link works.

### PROMOTE CELEBRATION GIVING

Set up a donation page — a good place is at RAZOO — and ask people to donate rather than give you a gift for your birthday, anniversary,


or the holidays. You can post a link to your RAZOO page at Facebook and Twitter. RAZOO has an app to install a donation widget right on your Facebook page. You can have a laptop at your party available for people to donate during the celebration.

## WIDGET DEFINITION

A widget is software that allows you to easily add functionality to your Web site, blog, or Facebook page. For example, your Web site designer has probably used widgets to add a navigation bar, search function, the icon to automatically “like” your Facebook page, polls, and more, on your Web site. Widgets are even used to create customizable forms that people can fill out and return to you. The best part of using widgets . . . you get a professional look without having to know any programming code.

These approaches are really a soft ask, and might or might not garner much response. But you may just introduce some new friends to your nonprofit, and you've done it very unobtrusively. I want to reiterate that you only take these asking-for-money steps after you have established that you have a personal relationship with an organization.

## Start Today

These techniques for using social media are all easy to incorporate into your daily life, but they can have an outsized impact if enough people take on just a few of them. I promise it won't seem like work at all. Once you dive in, you'll enjoy it. 

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