Strategies for Social Media Use in Nonprofits

Katherine Milde
Quinnipiac University

Robert M. Yawson
Quinnipiac University

The aim of this paper is to detail the social media engagement efforts used by successful nonprofits and to build on these insights in developing recommendations for effective social media plans to increase the visibility and service areas of public service organizations. The topic of social media use by nonprofits is viewed through a practice lens. Specific campaign activities for becoming distinguished nonprofits are identified. Essential aspects of social media engagement initiatives that translate into public service activities include tying online effort to the mission of the organization, providing for a dedicated person or team to ensure pointed social media efforts integrated into existing strategies, and developing a cost analysis coupled with benchmarks for success. Incorporating the recommendations detailed in this paper may help to expand the reach of otherwise resource-limited public service organizations, and can foster the transition from merely having supporters on paper to working with engaged, committed, and informed volunteers and donors.

INTRODUCTION

A permeating presence in our lives, social media has revolutionized interpersonal interaction in our society and has presented a platform for stakeholder feedback that has never before existed and that cannot be substituted. There is little left to debate as to whether or not organizations should use social media. There is no organization or company — big and small, which does not have an online presence in some capacity, and those who do not have any social media presence now find themselves to be the minority. Furthermore, many organizations have thoughtlessly entered into using digital platforms, creating media accounts without knowing in which resources to invest or what constitutes success (Elowitz & Li, 2009). This paper will explore the value of social media and determine how best social media can be used by nonprofits to serve communities with broader and measurable impact, creating identifiable change.

Social media is now a standard tool for interfacing with organizations' constituencies but can create unique challenges for public service organizations. Engaging customers and other stakeholders has become a primary objective of marketing teams (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). There exist difficulties relating to social media activities at nonprofits, and these typically result from a lack of knowledge about available social media options for specific efforts, limited staffing, concerns around how to manage it, and a lack of funding(Lee, 2015). However, every industry and niche, every social profile, is unique (Lee, 2015). The primary objective of this paper is to make recommendations for how best

nonprofits can tailor the plethora of social media options now available to their particular needs. More specifically, strategies for public service organizations to use social media platforms to obtain and engage with supporters, while continuing to execute their missions, will be presented.

A transformation of outreach services is occurring rapidly, a result of new high-wealth individuals and businesses who have a reputation for sharp focus, innovation, and for demanding a fast return on investment (Bishop & Green, 2008). Widespread impatience regarding any return on investment indicates a need for the kind of organizational leadership that not only incorporates diverse perspectives and clientele but also focuses more purposefully on inclusive results and service delivery. This pressure affects nonprofit organizations, particularly where funders' perceived lack of evidence about the success of programs and services calls into question the efficacy and existence of funded programs. While the effects of providing developmental aid are notoriously difficult to assess, indicators of organizational effectiveness can provide reliable proxies or 'leading' indicators of developmental efficacy (Yawson, Amoa-Awua, Sutherland, Smith, & Noamesi, 2006).

Overcoming an ambiguous connection between aid dollars and program activities should be pursued through assessment studies and through the institutionalization of appropriate systems that account for organizational effectiveness. Such activities provide the clearest evidence of developmental impact, and social media allows for affordable and manageable data collection (Yawson et al., 2006).

SOCIAL MEDIA USE: REWARDS AND RISKS

Social media "allows each organization to create and reach new networks and mobilize the networks to take action" (Guo & Saxton, 2014). Clients who engage with organizations via social media have a typically high level of attachment to the brands with which they engage, and, therefore, can serve as advocates for said organizations. This process includes three phases: sharing of content and ideas, then learning, and finally endorsing.

By effectively fostering dialogue about the mission, public service organizations facilitate progression towards said mission. Lovejoy and Saxton, (2012) have concluded that microblogging is a more effective tool for dialogue than the traditional website. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that "participation with a community of like-minded consumers is an important factor contributing to the success of the brand" (Dessart et al., 2015:30). Social media is a powerful way to communicate the value of nonprofits' efforts because it facilitates open communication (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011). Social platforms exponentially improve the visibility of offerings and interaction among current and potential stakeholders. A nonprofit could easily post various opportunities and could target marketing efforts to specific locations and demographics, using media tools to target people with specific interests and reach a larger yet more specific audience.

Advocacy and reach are not the only benefits of social media engagement. Loyal followers and supporters develop a sense of duty towards the organizations with which they engage, similar to board members who "put the interests of the organization above their personal financial interests or that of another organization with which they may also have a formal relationship," (Worth, 2013). A recent study of social media efforts made by sports TV channels revealed that interactivity between clients and the channel had a direct effect on channel loyalty (Lim, Hwang, Kim, & Biocca, 2015). Loyalty leads to contributions from followers too, which for nonprofits, can easily translate into funding and resource sharing.

The loss or lack of funding is an ever-present issue within nonprofits; every public service organization needs to ensure they can generate enough support to stay in operation and to maintain consistent programming and services. When faced with funding problems, nonprofits can become burdened with changing administrative duties and processes (Lazarevski, Irvine, & Dolnicar, 2008). This preoccupation with sustainability can detract from activities designed for interacting with one's constituency. This problem which is a result of limited resources is compounded by a lacking knowledge base of social media options within nonprofits. Fortunately, these hurdles are easy to overcome with the widespread availability of social media tutorials, and most media platforms require no fiscal support.

While the pervasive presence of social media is a primary reason for its use as a communication vehicle, that same trait can present a significant risk to organizations because anyone can begin, join or have a powerful impact on a brand of an organization (Worth, 2013). The risks in social media can manifest as negative comments or damaging reactions to content posted by the organization. However, these risks can be mitigated if an organization clearly states the goals and expectations for participation. An increased amount of monitoring social media accounts for negative material can reduce problems as well, but the risks remain. Organizations must remain diligent and have a responsibility to develop reactionary plans. With today's business climate being driven by ease of access and immediate gratification, it would be riskier for nonprofit organizations not to have a conspicuous and interactive online presence.

REVIEW OF SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

After reviewing nonprofits which have gained notoriety for their effective social media campaigns, it became apparent that all have multifaceted approaches to social media engagement. March of Dimes tops the Capterra Nonprofit Technology Blog's list of effective social media campaigns because March of Dimes shares stories on Facebook, blogs, uploads videos on YouTube, and even microblogs using Twitter. Another pertinent trend among successful social media campaigns is the development of a content strategy that is purposefully aligned with their particular missions (Readings, 2015). Encouraging user-generated content was also common among the leaders in social media. Best Friends Animal Society matches people with adoptable dogs with a facial recognition feature, allowing people to submit selfies then find a dog match for them. Big Brothers Big Sisters asked participants to tell their stories for video upload onto YouTube, and the resulting trove of videos could then be shared via other platforms to spread their mission and promote their cause (Readings, 2015).

In a world where a need for immediate gratification influences decisions, organizations need to be able to demonstrate results with a rapid accuracy. WaterAid is an organization that brings drinking water to communities around the world, and their use of Instagram exemplifies proper exploitation of this trend of end-user impatience. For their Malawi project, WaterAid utilized Instagram to post live updates on their project, and by using a specific hashtag, directed traffic to WaterAid's website, allowing for direct communication, feedback, and funding. Social media also allows for the delivery of instant progress reports to stakeholders and potential collaborators and donors (Readings, 2015). Keeping stakeholders informed is key to fostering their continued support of an organization. The nonprofit structure that is donation-facilitated, humanitarian-focused and membership-based presents opportunities for putting social media to good use.

Social Media, the Internet, Crowdfunding, and the Triple Bottom Line

Gone are the days when nonprofit organizations relied solely on traditional methods of fundraising such as direct mail, phone solicitations, or even door-to-door campaigns, in which volunteers would solicit their neighbors to make a gift to a charity. The advent of the internet and social media has opened doors, as well as a Pandora's Box, by providing nonprofits new ways to raise money, build awareness about their cause, recruit volunteers, thank donors, and share information. All of which, ultimately, contribute to managing a triple bottom line of social, environmental, and financial returns.

Today social media plays a critical role in helping organizations meet the triple bottom line. According to nonprofit technology consultant Five Paths, as organizations make "critical investments under tight budgets" it is imperative to select "technology systems that are the most compatible, affordable, and sustainable." These systems enable organizations to "communicate" effectively and "deliver services" in a manner that is "simple" and "cost-effective" (FivePaths, 2004). Thoughtful planning and integration of social media will be instrumental in the nonprofit organization's ability to meet the triple bottom line.

Social Media represents the next frontier for nonprofit and public service organizations. As society becomes increasingly globalized, social media – allows organizations to bring their work to people who

live both near and far. Fluency navigating the online world and utilizing its array of networks can help organizations espouse their benefits to society. Social Media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have provided a new forum for non-profit organizations to promote their mission and expand their base of supporters, donors, and volunteers.

Perhaps more significant than serving as a platform to promote an organization's mission, social media allows the newly expanded base of stewards to connect and engage with each other. Social networks are a soap-box for expressing thoughts and learning new ideas; it is also a melting pot for new relationships. As nonprofit organizations turn to social media to educate society on their mission, like-minded individuals have the opportunity to connect and share their interest in the organization and its work. These platforms allow relationships to begin and develop in ways that traditional outreach and engagement efforts have not. Thoughtful integration of social media into an organization's work can greatly impact its ability to meet the triple bottom line.

The Ice Bucket Challenge

The Ice Bucket Challenge is a recent example of how the ALS Association benefitted from the use of social media to improve its triple bottom line (The ALS Association, 2014). In the summer of 2014, individuals ranging from children to celebrities to CEOs throughout the world dumped ice buckets full of water over themselves and, via Facebook, challenged others to do the same. This action was tied directly to making a donation to help fight ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. These "antics" were videotaped, posted on Facebook, and eventually went viral. The challenge took on a life of its own and made a positive impact on the organization's triple bottom line, by raising money and awareness about this debilitating illness. Thanks to this innovative initiative, as of August 29, 2014, the ALS Association had received $100.9 million in donations compared to $2.8 million during the same period the year prior (Munk, 2014). The Ice Bucket Challenge has raised more than $115 million for ALS from existing donors, and more than 2.1 million new donors (Munk, 2014). ALS Association through its website and social media has demonstrated its transparency, an essential component of managing the triple bottom line.

Nonprofit organizations are under the scrutiny of charity watchdog groups; it is important for them to provide accurate information regarding their triple bottom line. Any misstep has the potential to create a social media firestorm, alienating donors, volunteers and the general public.

Giving Tuesday

December 31 is a significant day for nonprofits, as it marks the last day people may make charitable contributions for the current calendar year and receive a tax benefit. In 2012, a new, significant day for nonprofits was established by New York's 92nd Street Y in partnership with the United Nations Foundation. Giving Tuesday is a global movement that has engaged over 30,000 organizations worldwide to come together for a common purpose: to celebrate generosity and to give (GivingTuesday, 2016).

Giving Tuesday takes place the Tuesday after Black Friday and Cyber Monday, which are blockbuster days for retail sales in the United States. Many nonprofits capitalized on the holiday giving and shopping season by participating in Giving Tuesday. According to preliminary results from Indiana University's Lilly School of Philanthropy, produced in partnership with the Case Foundation, nonprofit organizations raised nearly $46 million in 2014, a 64% increase from the previous year (Held, 2014). Online donations were estimated at $4.6 million for gifts made through the Network for Good online platform, which works mainly with smaller organizations, and $26.1 million in contributions were made via Blackbaud software for nonprofits (Held, 2014). More than 15,000 nonprofits reaped the financial rewards from Giving Tuesday, which had 296,291 donations in 2014, a 53% increase from the previous year. Also, the number of Tweets about #Giving Tuesday more than tripled from 2013 to 2014, and there was an increase in the number of volunteers (Held, 2014).

Tweets and Facebook posts about a nonprofit can help increase awareness of the organization to a bigger audience, which may include potential new donors. Also, it provides valuable insight to staff

members about donor trends and motivation. Finally, the data obtained gives the organization an opportunity to adjust its social media strategy for greater impact.

The Triple Bottom-Line (TBL)

Due to increased competition and the economic downturn of recent years, there has been a shift in the ways 501 (c) (3) nonprofits operate; they are beginning to function like for-profit businesses. With the rise of the internet and technology, savvy donors have access to a plethora of information about nonprofit organizations, thus establishing public demand for accountability, transparency and fiscal responsibility. Also, members and donors are ultimately customers who keep nonprofit organizations in business and afloat by making financial contributions and/or participating in the programs they offer. The triple bottom-line (TBL) is an important approach nonprofit organizations can use to demonstrate responsible stewardship of resources and the advancement of the organization's mission. The concept TBL, also known as people, planet, profit, has its genesis from the world of sustainability-focused business. It encapsulates a broader spectrum of values and benchmarks for measuring organizational (and societal) success: economic, ecological, and social, and makes a case for companies to account for the full cost and impact of doing business. Social media has begun to play a key role in how nonprofits improve their TBL. The standard for TBL is being redefined and is evolving as a driver of innovation in nonprofits.

As leaders of nonprofits strive to maintain their TBL, formal social media strategies are becoming paramount. Clearly, technology, the internet, and social media are powerful tools that can benefit an organization's TBL. In today's fast-paced world, people are connected 24/7 and crave instant communication. As of February 2014, Facebook had 1.23 billion users; 52 million of those users access the mobile platform on a *daily* basis (Taulli, 2014). However, a rising concern is that Facebook has seen a decrease in the number of teenagers using its platform and studies have shown this technologically savvy and independent generation is shifting toward texting as its preferred communication vehicle (Olson, 2013). Text to give may be a way for nonprofit organizations to reach millennials. It is our contention, though that this reduction in the use of Facebook by this independent generation and future of philanthropy does not in any way negate the importance of social media use to nonprofits. Regardless of the medium, first impressions mean a lot, whether in person or online. To maximize the potential of their online presence, nonprofits must make certain their website and social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) are regularly updated. Using social media to share current news about how the organization is advancing its mission and making prudent use of its funds will keep potential and future donors and volunteers interested. Failure to do so may disengage these individuals, hence hurting the TBL.

There is no overt cost to participate in these platforms. They do, however, require an investment of time. Once a nonprofit decides to proceed with a particular social media site, it must also commit to keeping the content current and fresh. There should be new posts regularly to keep followers interested. Failure to do so may result in people not visiting the sites, unfollowing or un-liking the organization, and finally, not making a contribution of either time or money. Again, this can hurt the triple bottom line. In recognition that many nonprofits have limited staff resources, it may prove beneficial for them to use a platform such as Hootsuite, in essence, a one-stop shop for managing multiple social media platforms. This tool helps an organization monitor what people are saying about it and allows for quick response times. The user-friendly dashboard of Hootsuite makes it possible to view streams of content from various platforms simultaneously. It is also recommended that this should not be left to lower level staff and interns. It should be the priority and involvement of senior employees including C-Suite level employees. For example having the CEO provide comments on the social media platforms and respond to donors concerns. Hearing from the CEO, rather than an anonymous social media ghost writer, sends a strong message that the organization cares about its donors and values their feedback. Additionally, it is important for nonprofits to monitor what the competition is doing on social media and strive to stay one click ahead, as competition for donors and funds is fierce.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is yet another way in which nonprofits can use the social media to benefit their TBL. "Used strategically, crowdfunding helps nonprofits build meaningful engagement, inform their work, spread their messages, and expand their donor base to increase their overall funding and impact" (Gore & DiGiammarino, 2014). Crowdfunding is a somewhat grassroots approach to fundraising in which donors encourage their personal network of friends, family, and colleagues to join them in supporting a specific organization or cause. In summary, although the use of social media and technology by nonprofits is still in its infancy, the future looks promising for organizations to utilize these methods to raise money and advance their missions. We can only wonder what the next "big thing" will be to help organizations manage their TBL.

IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

It has become evident that an effective social media initiative for any nonprofit organization must utilize social networking to broadcast its mission and engage with its audience. "Social Media can be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting while Social Networking is a tool and utility for connecting with others" (Edosomwan et al., 2011, p. 83). Social media networking allows organizations to expand their knowledge about members' and community needs and interests exponentially and improves their ability to track interactions with social media analysis tools while responding strategically to trends. Technology-in-practice becomes structured by experiences, knowledge, meanings, habits, power relations, norms, and available technologies (Orlikowski, 2000).

A priority when implementing social media development plans must be to determine comprehensive social media guidelines for the organization to address various issues, one must create a plan for change before trying to create change. The first of these issues to address is the organization's strategic vision, regarding the selection of the right social media mix for the types of service messages they want to relay and for the geographic locations of those they want to serve. A general understanding of the degree to which the organization wants to establish a social media management system also needs to be developed. Self-promotion should not be the primary goal of social media-driven campaigns but can be peripheral to community programming and event promotion.

Safko, (2012) details the effective "Five Steps to Social Media Success." The first step of this process is to analyze current marketing strategies and related expenditures, leading to the disclosure of the cost of acquiring new support for an organization. The next step prescribes a focus on developing for the organization three high-profile social media categories: "blogging, microblogging, and social networks." Once identified and set up, these three tools require integration into existing marketing and engagement strategies. By reviewing the existing priorities of strategic plans, selecting more easily achieved goals with some help from social media becomes attainable. As resource limitations are a common problem among nonprofits, addressing such limitations' effects on the newly-developed strategy is step four discussed by Safko, (2012). The final step detailed Safko, (2012) discussed is establishing a form of measurement for success.

A cost-benefit analysis should be done to demonstrate the need for some limited funding to support social media initiatives and campaigns. Managing multiple social media accounts could potentially be very time-consuming, exposing a chronic problem among nonprofits. Many nonprofits assume they do not have the staff available to give a social media initiative the initial attention it requires and make the mistake of not measuring the return on investment of social media use. Measuring the return on investment helps nonprofits to be intentional about marketing and engagement activities. Organizations must determine benchmarks for success: what marketing objectives they are trying to satisfy, why stakeholders would participate with or visit their platform, and also what they are going to do to link their efforts to their mission (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

As specified earlier, social media interactions can present risks. The Information Systems Audit and Control Association, Inc. (ISACA) has identified and categorized these risks as privacy-related risks, regulatory and compliance risks, any loss of control, brand loss and negative publicity, and also identity

theft (ISACA, 2012). The top organizations involved with social media campaigns have highlighted and taken steps to mitigate these types of threats unique to their social media campaigns. It is important to determine the level of control kept within the organization and the level of control awarded to the community, and to monitor the discussions on organization-related topics.

Regardless of the exact approach to social media, such outreach efforts need to be managed by a dedicated entity within an organization. Recent research on this topic found that "organizations with defined public relations departments are more likely to adopt social media technologies to achieve organizational goals" (Curtis et al., 2010). Media managers, or even a small group of volunteers dedicated to social media, could be provided training and develop guidelines for communicating with community members online. Not only is it essential that an organization manage properly its online media presence, but that it implements its online processes with the mission of the organization in mind (Worth, 2013).

CONCLUSION

For nonprofit organizations to use social media effectively, it must initially take the time to develop a comprehensive initiative. This initiative should include analysis of their current strategy, goals, and marketing expenditures; and development of usage plans for the blogging, microblogging, and social networks, ensuring the integration of the plan into the strategy of the entire organization. With a plan in place and metrics to measure success selected, nonprofit organizations will be able to conserve two of their most precious resources: time and money. An organization must focus on the implementation of said initiative, ensuring each activity is in line with the mission and serves to strengthen relationships and the reputation of the organization. Communication with stakeholders is the foundation of a successful campaign. Evaluation and adjustments are also necessary steps in developing a social media initiative.

Social media use has a positive relationship with engagement and its three sub-categories, that is, social capital, civic engagement, and political participation (Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2015). Maintaining an active presence online is and will continue to be an essential component of marketing and communications strategy (Worth, 2013). Despite any financial and time-related limitations, the value and usefulness of social media cannot be overstated. In maintaining relevance in today's digital society, nonprofit organizations benefit from developing and implementing strategies that use these tools in support of their missions.

As nonprofit organizations respond to the increased public demand for accountability, they can further enhance the triple bottom line by fully embracing the opportunities available through technology. Social media, the internet, and crowdfunding provide new options that can help organizations meet the triple bottom line. Social media represents the next frontier for nonprofit and hybrid organizations and allows an expanded base of stewards to connect and engage with each other. Crowdfunding through the use of social media offers a completely new way for nonprofits to obtain funding.

In conclusion, the world is a fluid and rapidly changing medium in which nonprofit organizations can quickly become submerged. By remaining abreast of alternative forms of fundraising and being responsive to public expectations of accountability, nonprofits can successfully use social media to boost the triple bottom line to demonstrate fiscal responsibility, environmental sustainability, and social impact. This, in turn, can enhance a nonprofit organization's long-term financial sustainability and lead to even greater positive social impact. Thoughtful integration of the organization's mission with social media can further enhance a nonprofit's ability to effect change. Nonprofit organizations will be well served when they effectively use social media for their triple bottom line.

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