Choose the Social-Media Networks That Fit Your Charity's Mission

By Cassie Moore

While 1.4 million follow,
Charity Water is one of the most popular nonprofit groups on Twitter.
The organization’s Twitter feed reflects its youthful energy, with vibrant photos of children drinking from newly drilled wells and goofy, attention-getting fare, such as its recent breakdancing contest for staff members.
Charity Water’s Twitter presence grew “very organically,” says Paul Young, the group’s 50-year-old director of digital engagement. Its leadership and supporters were early adopters of Twitter, and the nonprofit got an early push from the first global Tweetstival, a social-media-fueled event in 2009 that helped it raise $200,000.
The charity is a dominant cause on other social-media outlets as well. It was an early presence on Instagram and popular on Facebook.

Shiny New Networks
But what comes naturally to Mr. Young and many others of his generation isn’t intuitive to everyone. And with more social-media platforms emerging—Instagram, Vine, Pinterest, and more—it’s easy for nonprofits to fall prey to what Melanie Mathos, senior public-relations manager at Blackbaud and co-author of 101 Social Media Tactics for Nonprofits, calls the “social-network syndrome,” jumping on the next big thing without much of a plan.

Because nonprofits have limited resources, it’s important for groups first to go where their supporters are, says Sheri Buen, senior online communications manager of VolunteerMatch. (Her group has worked with LinkedIn on its new Volunteer MarketPlace, which connects LinkedIn members with charities that need help.)

“Know your audience, first and foremost,” urges Ms. Buen. “Know who they are, what they want, why they should care about you, and especially where they are.” That, she says, makes everything else easier and more successful.

Among the other essentials, according to nonprofit leaders:

Start with the basics, then set priorities. Facebook and Twitter are the go-to platforms for most nonprofits on social media, says Janessa Comor, marketing director of the Trevor Project, a charity that helps lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths and those who are questioning their sexual identity, and focuses especially on preventing suicide.

If you don’t have a Facebook or Twitter presence, people may question your legitimacy,” she says. “Over all, these are probably two that you should try to keep and maintain.”

Garth Moore, U.S. digital director at the One Campaign, an antipoverty advocacy group, recommends focusing on the networks most likely to turn visitors into reliable supporters—or otherwise “give the most bang for your buck.”

One’s first “tier,” he says, includes Facebook and Twitter, followed by YouTube, with Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn representing the third tier.

Facebook especially drives people to sign the group’s petitions, says Mr. Moore, while the third-tier networks are good for building familiarity with One’s brand.

The social-media use to strategic goals. Some groups mostly want to get donations using social media, while others want to encourage advocacy or just find an easy way to stay in touch with supporters. Deciding the primary objective helps charities choose where to focus their efforts.

Facebook has helped charities attract both money and attention. In December, the social network introduced a donation button so donors can give to any of 10 charities without leaving the network. Facebook has said it intends to extend the donation button to other charities.

With so many platforms emerging—like Instagram, Vine, and Pinterest—it’s easy to just jump on the next one without a plan.

How to Pick the Best Outlets for Reaching a Charity’s Goals

RAISING MONEY: FACEBOOK

“It’s great for reaching baby boomers who are considering charitable gifts, and it’s probably one of the only platforms where you can raise any money,” says Maatiele Mathos, co-author of 101 Social Media Tactics for Nonprofits.

SPURRING ADVOCACY: TWITTER, GOOGLE+

“If a human-rights nonprofit is looking to find activists to change policies or react to real-time events, using Twitter and hosting hangouts on Google+ may be their golden ticket,” says Fara Trompeter, vice president of Big Duck, a marketing consultancy in New York that serves nonprofit clients.

REACHING MEN: GOOGLE+

“Google+ is really dominated by men,” says Ms. Mathos. “Young, techy men hang out there.”

REACHING WOMEN: PINTEREST

Eighty percent of Pinterest’s users are female. “If your nonprofit has a lot of women supporters, it might make sense to be there,” says Frank Barry, director of digital marketing at Blackbaud, a fundraising technology and consulting company.

“Like a dumbbells to share, you should probably go get it a shot.”

LURING COLLEGE ALUMNI: FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN

These platforms, says Ms. Trompeter, are essential for colleges and universities if they “try to get his alumni pitch. You have to tell a story in a very social, short, visual way; I think it fits in really well with communicating your value really simply.”

TELLING A CHARITY’S STORY WITH VISUALS: INSTAGRAM, PINTEREST, VINE

With a 15-second video on Instagram, Ms. Mathos says, “basically it’s like your elevator pitch. You have to tell a story in a very succinct, short, visual way. I think it fits in really well with communicating your value really simply.”

But charities without a lot of pictures and video to share should avoid these networks, says Jeanna Comor, marketing director of the Trevor Project, a charity that serves gay youths. Says Ms. Comor, “it’s not going to be sustainable to keep generating that kind of visual content to keep those platforms current.”

INFLUENCING MOVERS, SHAKERS, AND EVERYONE ELSE: TWITTER

“Twitter is a really mixed audience,” says Ms. Mathos. “You have [donor] prospects, peers, influencers, and a very diverse ethnic base.”
Charity: Water was an early adopter of Twitter, and its mix of sincere and playful tweets has helped the international-development group gain attention.

When Trying Out a Social Network, First Test It, Setting Goals and a Timeline

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text on Facebook and Twi-
ter, but it has branched out to
Pintrest and Googles because of features on those sites that
align closely with the work it
does.

For instance, Ms. Conner
says, she noticed that people
on Pinterest liked collecting inspira-
tional quotes. So the charity
began compiling quotes that re-
lected its mission on a Pinter-
est board titled "A Pinch of In-
spiration." "One of the goals over all for
our social-media platforms is
to really create a supportive
and affirming environment for
LGBTQ youth," she says. "If a
young person wants to create a
board that they look at to feel
acceptance and love and sup-
port, that's something that we
can help with."

The group also uses the hang-
out feature of Googles, which
allows participants to see and
talk to one another.

Each site, says Ms. Conner,
has become an important resourc-
se for transgender youth like
those the Trevor Project serves. "They're going to online video
to get information and
and feel more connected and to feel less isolated."
The Wounded Warrior
Project, a group serves injured
military veterans, also has
plans to use the Google hang-
out feature so that veterans can
interact with and mentor one
another.

"It is a way to be able to
reach out to people we might
not be able to engage directly in
conversations," says Michelle
Roberts, communications direc-
tor.

Experiment, but monitor
results carefully. "People have
to be super open and willing
to just hop on a social network,"
says Frank Barry, director of
digital marketing at Blackboard.

"A little time getting
comfortable with the etiquette
and the features and how you're
supposed to interact there, and
over time you start to figure out
"So many tech-savvy
people want to help out,
and it's a great way to recruit
a skilled volunteer."}

RESOURCES TO GUIDE CHARITIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Social Media Tactics for Nonprofits, by Melanie
Mathis and Chad Norman (John Wiley & Sons, 2012,
$39.95 hardcover; $29.99 e-book)
For free download, go to: idealware.org
For free download, go to: pewinternet.org

The Trevor Project, which serves gay youths,
is appealing to its supporters by collecting inspirational messages on a Pinterest board.

战略性慈善: 社交媒体的使用，非营利组织的首次尝试

一本书由Mark Mellen

开发了具体用于非营利

领导者。

“战略性慈善: 社交媒体的使用，非营利组织的首次尝试”

志愿者经过两次培训

课程和使用他们

自己的社交媒体账户在

Facebook和Twitter来推动

组织，提供对提供

服务的人帮助

在紧急情况下。

"这是在社会空间中"，Laura

Hove, vice president of public
relations at the organization.

"这是一个可怕的地方

对组织来说，去，因为你

是必须在有控制的小

一点控制。但我们不能

放弃一大笔的奖励正在

做着这个。

"They're going to online
video content to get
information and feel
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less isolated."