

THE TOOL KIT

News, Advice, and Resources for Nonprofit Workers

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

WITH 1.4 million followers, 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 30-year-old director of digital engagement. Its leadership and supporters were early adopters of Twitter, and the nonprofit got an early

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push from the first global Twestival, a social-media-fueled event in 2009 that helped it raise \$260,000.

The charity is a dominant cause on other social-media outlets as well. It was an early presence on Instagram and is 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 nonprofit groups 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 "shiny 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 Shari Ilsen, 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 helpers.)

"Know your audience, front to back," urges Ms. Ilsen. "Know who they are, what they want, why they should care about you, and especially where they are." This, 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 Jenessa Connor, marketing director for 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, those 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.

Tie 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 19 charities without leaving the network.

Facebook has said it intends to extend the donation button to other chari-

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

ties but as yet has no timetable for doing that.

The social network is also efficient at spurring advocacy among charity supporters. Last March, for example, the Human Rights Campaign sought to encourage public support for legalizing same-sex marriage by asking people on Facebook to replace their profile photos with a red version of the group's logo, an equal sign.

The campaign was deemed a success because 2.7 million more people updated their profile photos the day after the campaign was announced, compared with the same day in the previous week.

And although the campaign was not geared toward fundraising, the nonprofit did raise more than \$120,000 in connection with the effort.

"People that take an action on behalf of an organization are exponentially more likely to give a donation," says Ms. Mathos.

Look for ties between your charity's mission and the medium. The Trevor Project focuses most of its at-

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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 Melanie 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 Farra 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. "If you have great imagery to share, you should probably go give it a shot."

LURING COLLEGE ALUMNI: FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN



These platforms, says Ms. Trompeter, are essential for colleges and universities if their "No. 1 goal is to use social media as part of their efforts to engage alumni."

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 mission really simply."



But charities without a lot of pictures and video to share should avoid these networks, says Jenessa Connor, marketing director of the Trevor Project, a charity that serves gay youths. Says Ms. Connor, "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, press, influencers, and a very diverse ethnic base."

—Cassie Moore

Charity: Water was an early adopter of Twitter, and its mix of sincere and playful tweets has helped the international-development group gain attention.

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

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

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 tion on Facebook and Twitter, but it has branched out to Pinterest and Google+ because of features on those sites that align closely with the work it does.
 For instance, Ms. Connor says, she noticed that people on Pinterest liked collecting inspirational quotes. So the charity began compiling quotes that reflected its mission on a Pinterest board titled "A Pinch of Inspiration."
 "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 support, that's something that we can help with."
 The group also uses the hang-out feature of Google+, which allows participants to see and talk to one another. And it maintains a presence on video-sharing sites.

Such sites, says Ms. Connor, have become important resources for transgender youths like those the Trevor Project serves: "They're going to online video content to get information and to feel more connected and to feel less isolated."

The Wounded Warrior Project, a group that serves injured military veterans, also has plans to use the Google+ hang-out feature so that veterans can interact with and mentor one another.

"This is a way to be able to reach out to people we might not be able to engage directly in a conversation," says Michelle Roberts, communications director.

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 Blackbaud. "Spend a little time getting

RESOURCES TO GUIDE CHARITIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- *101 Social Media Tactics for Nonprofits*, by Melanie Mathos and Chad Norman (John Wiley & Sons, 2012, \$39.95 hardcover; \$29.99 e-book)
- *Nonprofit Social Media Decision Guide*, by Idealware. For free download, go to: idealware.org
- *Social Media Update 2013*, by Pew Research Center. For free download, go to: pewinternet.org

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."

if your audience is there." Sometimes a charity's first forays will miss the mark.

For example, Girls Inc., a youth charity, originally struggled to adapt to LinkedIn, says Cheryl Blowers, the group's associate director of marketing and communications. But then her staff members began to understand that people want to use the network to discuss professional and career issues, so

it issued posts that focused on mentoring, on issues of interest to working women, and on science, technology, engineering, and math education. Now, she says, "we're seeing that has woken the group up a little bit."

Charities should lay out a timeline and goals for new platforms, says Mr. Moore, of the One Campaign.

"It may be a three-month test where you decide to give a new platform a shot, like you're going to up your work on it by 50 or 75 percent," he says. "You're going to look at the dividend three months from now and see if it has paid off. And if not, I think the prudent gesture is to move back down to another network and try other channels."

Get some help. To keep the organization's online presence fresh and share the labor involved, consider enlisting an intern, staff members who work

outside the charity's communications department, or even volunteers for social-media tasks.

"So many tech-savvy people want to help out, and it's a great way to recruit a skilled volunteer," says Ms. Ilsen, of VolunteerMatch.

The American Red Cross has a social-media staff of only three people but a social-media volunteer force of 160. These

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

volunteers undergo two training courses and then use their own social-media accounts on Facebook and Twitter to advocate for the organization or provide assistance to people in their regions when emergencies happen.

"It's OK to empower people to answer questions out there in the social space," says Laura Howe, vice president of public relations at the organization. "It's a scary place sometimes for organizations to go, because you do have to surrender a little bit of control. But we've really reaped a lot of rewards from doing that."

Strategic Planning That Works: First Aid for Nonprofits

A new book by Mark Mullen developed specifically for nonprofit leaders.

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