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Social Media For Social Good: A Guide To New Media For College Activists

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SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SOCIAL GOOD: A GUIDE TO NEW MEDIA FOR COLLEGE
ACTIVISTS

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Bachelor of Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By
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2011

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2011

ABSTRACT

In a world of Tweets and status updates, how do we take all those hours perusing social networks and put them to good use? In my thesis project, *Social Media for Social Good: A Guide to New Media For College Activists*, I explore the uses of these networks to activate people towards building positive social change. It is my opinion that college is the best time to be an activist. How do college students communicate? Social Media. From the campus to the global scale, social media can be effectively used to mobilize people to take action on a wide array of issues. Navigating all of the services, and their uses for the student activist is complicated, and therefore my guide presents some insight on how we can take Facebook and Twitter past FarmVille and updates on your morning breakfast to a useful set of tools for organizing and mobilization. The work concludes with a look at some emerging social media for the organizer to pay attention to that will shape of the world of tomorrow, along with the work they do.

To my late grandfather John Houchins “Pop” whom I always hope to make proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been the summation of four great years here at Western Kentucky University, and to that end so many people deserve thanks for their role in helping me discover the person I am, and fostering my growth as an organizer and activist. First, I have to thank my CET/T advisor Sam McFarland, whose support and guidance in this project and help in realizing I had already done the work in order to write this thesis, and for giving me an academic foundation for my passion and work. Thanks also goes to Roger Murphy and Mac McKerral for their work with me on my thesis committee.

Thanks also goes to the Honors College, whose community led me to the best friends and fellow activists that I have worked with in my years here. Without that community, the great work and progress that has been made there past four years might not have ever occurred.

To Matt Vaughan, for always challenging me to be a better person and activist and to keep fighting for those affected by injustice and for being the best friend one can have. To my fellow members of WKUAID over the years, for keeping me motivated and for working with me to build a better world for all, even when we face what seem like insurmountable obstacles. You all are tremendous individuals, and keep my faith in

humanity very high. To my friends who have been there over the years, thanks for making my college years the best thus far.

To my family, who has always supported me in all of my endeavors no matter how crazy or serious they may be. To my Dad, Chuck Harris, for being a good person to banter with from a different mindset, and keeping my ideas grounded in the realities of a broader group of people. To Sparky, Mark Healy, for being the most inspirational figure in my life, keeping me fighting and confident that I can persevere like he has. To my Grandma, Mary Houchins, for introducing me to Public Radio and Classical Music, and subsequently helping to drive my passion for paying attention to what is happening in the world and an appreciation for a wide variety of cultural experiences. Finally, to my Mother, Antonette Healy, for being the best Mom a person could ever ask for, taking care of me even when times were tough, and for being my biggest fan and strongest supporter.

VITA

May 31, 1989.....Born – Montgomery County, Tennessee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Our nation was founded on the premise that when people aren't satisfied with what they see happening in the world, they rise up in collective action to try and change the circumstances. Dissent in the US is just as important now as it was when our nation was founded. Our progress as a nation has hinged upon people breaking society's rules, taking action where others are complacent or silent. The abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, the Civil Rights movement- our history is one of dissent. So to you perspective dissenter, I say welcome to a long tradition of what I see as a patriotic duty, so called "fighting the good fight."

Students at universities and colleges have the advantage to be in a unique situation to affect change at all levels, be it on your campus or around the world. Life-long activism is both important and possible, but in school you may have the time and resources to organize better than at any other part of your life. You are at a time when you don't have to worry about the responsibilities of a job and family, but after a childhood when you lacked the power to vote. You are now a serious constituent, and the decision makers have to take you seriously. They are baffled by us, and very interested in what we think and how to appeal to us as a constituency so that we will vote for them on

election day. The time to fight and work on things you believe in is *now*, and this guide hopes to help you in your quest to change the world, be it in whatever small or large way you may find.

And how do we as college students communicate? Social media is the medium of choice for we millennials. From Facebook to Twitter and everything in between, we are connected to our friends and family 24/7 in real time. We can know what our friend is eating for breakfast, exact coordinates to where they are eating, and how they feel about those waffles if they decide to tweet it out to the world. But is social media good for more than just FarmVille and breakfast reports? I believe so, and have become an advocate in the idea of social media for social good.

WHAT ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT?

It's important to remember where you come from, and to know your own story of how you became an activist or "politicized." Your story is what keeps you going, and it will inevitably be a topic of conversation with fellow organizers when doing your work. Spend some time reflecting on why you are fighting for justice, and build that into a narrative for your own personal motivation. That will show others why you are so passionate, and may instill a passion in them. It is one of your strongest assets as an activist, as people relate to stories more than facts and figures.

Being an activist doesn't start with just saying "Hey, I should really go protest something!" Every one of us has a story of where we began, when an issue first became important to us, that changed the way we see the world and lit a fire for justice within us. Maybe you saw a film that showed you the impact humans are having on our environment, went on a mission trip to a developing country and saw poverty and disease

first hand, have been discriminated against because of your ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability or know someone who has, or even see a campus policy that you see as negative for you and your fellow students. Your passion always comes from a personal story that got you involved. Remember and hang on to that story; it is one of your biggest assets. Here is mine...

MY STORY

I became politicized at the age of 5. I know this sounds crazy, but I remember the moment so clearly. It was early in my kindergarten days when I found myself out on the playground for recess. I was still learning the ways of school, and mostly kept to myself. I noticed out in the field away from the playground some older kids picking on a boy from my class, Rashawn. He had a speech impediment, which caused a stutter. Something inside me was awakened and I rushed to the scene. I quickly pulled Rashawn away from the other two and took him off to go play. I became aware of justice and injustice that day, and it is something that stuck with me.

During high school I became engaged in youth activism around global issues, such as water access and poverty alleviation. That is where I first became aware of the ONE Campaign, an organization founded by U2 front man Bono, that sought to bring advocacy for the world's poor to the governments of the developed world. As I entered college, I found myself with like-minded individuals who were in my dorm, and a part of the Western Kentucky University Honors College, who were committed to my ideals of global citizenship and duty to take action against injustice. We founded a chapter of a national organization, Americans for Informed Democracy, which became known as WKUAID. My college career has been defined by my work in building this organization

and helping lead successful events and campaigns, including winning the ONE campus challenge for WKU, lobbying successfully for legislation to reform foreign assistance, planning a national conference with students from across the nation coming to WKU, to successfully campaigning to make WKU the fourth Fair Trade University in the United States, just to name a few highlights. This experience has been rewarding and empowering and has shaped my career aspirations to continue this work.

Throughout these past four years, I have been the “web guru” of the group, leading all of WKUAID’s social media and web presences. I have built a custom website, wkuaid.org, managed our Facebook and Twitter accounts, created rich media content to share, and led the organization in this capacity to connect with our constituencies. Along with my actions locally, I have taken this knowledge and my research and eye on the trends in social media for social good to other national organizations like Americans for Informed Democracy and ONE, and have presented at conferences on the subject. I have developed many social media skills and hope to share them with you in this guide: *Social Media for Social Good: A Guide to New Media For College Activists*.

CHAPTER 2

ACTIVISM OR “SLACKTIVISM”

We have been accused as a generation of being “slacktivists,” a term that ascribes us to being lazy activists that merely click an online petition every once in a while to feel good about ourselves. I object! Ben Rattary, founder of Change.org, says it all in this, “If the Internet didn’t exist, Barack Obama would not be president of the United States. The fact that the most powerful person in the world wouldn’t be in that position without the Internet and organizing online says something.” (Kessler, 2010) We have a unique opportunity to engage those who may not be as passionate about a cause, but are able to make small efforts. It was those type of actions that made the 2008 Obama Campaign successful. Now, that success is a model for others working to organize using these new tools.

While many saw the 2008 campaign as a change in political culture, and a proving point for social media as a real force, the recent uprisings in North Africa seem to bring final proof of how social media has changed the ways in which we can effectively organize. One activist in Egypt stated the role social media played in their successful revolt, “We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.” (Howard, 2011) Major media have latched onto this story

about the “Facebook revolution,” while others have cautioned against overemphasizing the role digital media played. It is important to recognize the individuals who were organizing the protests, and taking the risks that are inherent in dissent, but discounting these new tools that helped make their work more effective, and enabled them to have a larger impact, is a major oversight.

Being able to coordinate thousands of people simultaneously to take some sort of action is a new opportunity. These tools we now have in our activist tool belt give us this possibility. While the internet petition is not the biggest leap for people to be activists, it adds to the constituent power in numbers that can lead to transformative change. Ben Rattary goes on to say, “The goal here is social change, it’s not to make things difficult. It may be really difficult to go protest in person, but it might be more effective to mobilize a hundred other people using the web to simultaneously send letters to a single target.”

(Kessler, 2010) We have the same goals as activists in relation to our causes. We want to be able to inform a large audience, organize a community around these issues that feels connected and as part of the broader movement, and activate that community taking action that can affect positive change.

If you are using this guide, you are probably already way past this slacktivist category and are ready to campaign for progressive change in some way. But how do you set yourself apart as a true activist and advocate on an issue? I believe the key is education. The web is the ultimate resource for activist, and that includes all of the prep work and understanding you need to gain before taking action. You see the problem you want to fix or the change you want to happen, but before you act it is important to fully understand the issue. ***Educate yourself!*** If you are going to be an advocate then the best

way to prepare is to become an expert of sorts. I'm not talking about years of study, I mean do some basic fact finding in order to be the most informed advocate you can be. Your passion, backed with solid facts, is a killer combination that will set your work apart. You are no slacktivist, my friend, you are today's activist! A millennial that is ready to change the world for the better, so let's get you some tools from the social media for social good tool belt!

CHAPTER 3

TWITTER

140 characters to change the world! Talk about an exercise in brevity! The very first tweet was sent out by one of the cofounders, @Jack, on March 21st, 2006. There are now almost 200 million users around the world tweeting 140 million times a day, which equals 1 billion tweets each week (Picard, 2011). Why 140 characters? In its roots as a mobile service, being able to send messages in the 160 character mobile SMS (text message) limit with a username led to this stipulation. The art of crafting the perfect tweet is now a skill that is needed in any corporation or nonprofit to be a part of today's new media trends. It makes sense in our society where we like to consume bite size pieces of information and then move on to the next. Your tweets have to capture the reader and prompt them to take action. Twitter's strength lies in its instantaneous communication and organizing capacities, and this is what gives the activist community a great set of tools. In Figure 1 we see how news of an Earthquake in California was spread first on Twitter before it hit the newswires (Twitter, 2008).

Twitter updates mentioning quakes

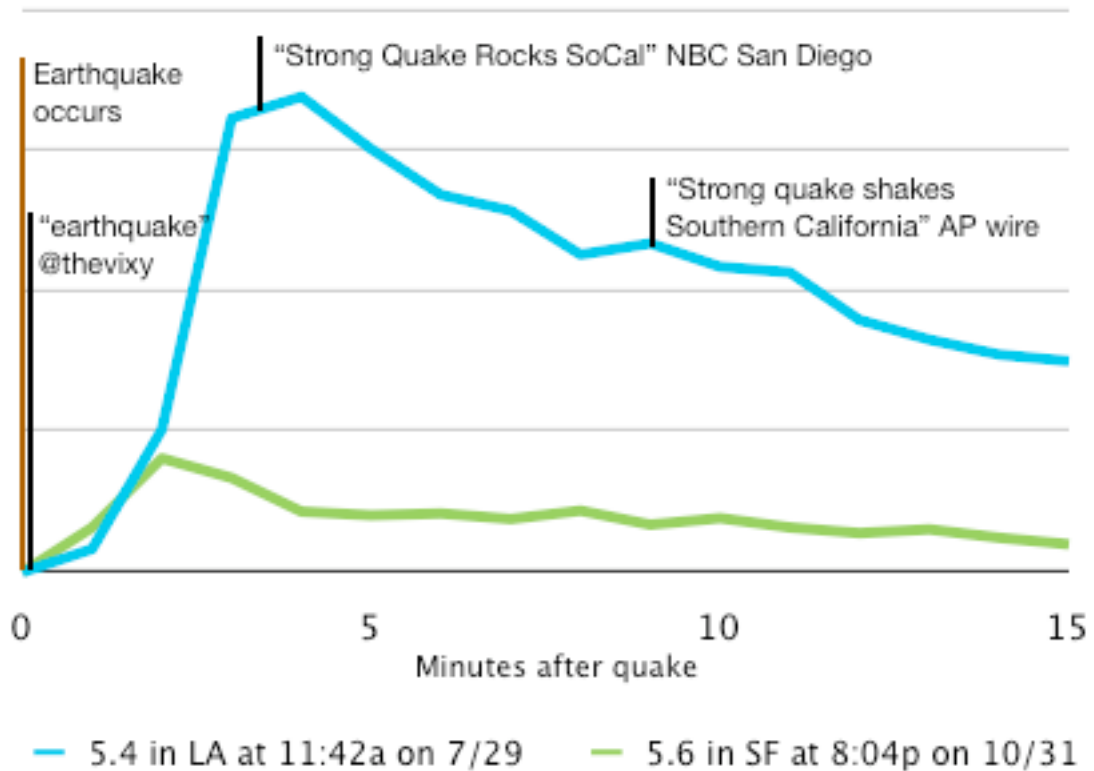


Figure 1 Tweets Ahead of Traditional News

FOLLOWING & TWEETING

One of my favorite applications is the ability to “follow” different public figures, businesses, nonprofits and causes. Say I am interested in environmental activism; I can follow @greenpeace to get short updates on timely actions I can take. Twitter helps to aggregate information from news sources, causes, and public figures that help paint a picture for the issue, and helps you map the players in order to be most effective. It is also a public forum for communicating with those different parties, as it allows direct communication.

There is a great example here with many politicians who can now source directly from their constituents when an issue comes before them. Many members of Congress are now on Twitter, so communicating with them is now a more direct process. You can organize major outreach with many others working to tweet to that member of congress. And the best thing is that it is all done on the same service. Twitter is more open about a public forum than Facebook, where more intricate profiles and friends are the most common type of relationship. You can even create and share lists of other users in order to categorize the different accounts you interact with.

So start up your Twitter account by following the organizations you work with, your representatives in government, and anything else you find relevant. You'll begin receiving updates, and that will help you find more accounts to follow, and will probably lead you to unfollow some as well.

Now as you work with others in your group, you will have the tools to be able to work quickly with one another in an organized setting. You can update your fellow activists on your exact location if you embed it with your tweet, share photos of what is happening at that location, and be able to quickly adapt to whatever may be happening with real time updating. We have seen examples of this in the wave of pro-democracy protests that is currently sweeping the Middle East, with the Twitter revolution in Iran, and with the relief efforts in Haiti after the earthquake.

Another useful feature of Twitter is the *Trending Topics* section, which is starting to become more localized so you can see what the conversation is that is happening around you. Trending topics is a list of popularly used words or phrases at the time across Twitter, and is a way to show what the larger conversation is about at any moment.

Taking these analytics and using the power of *Twitter Search*, you can begin to find the story behind the actions of your movement. As I said before, the narrative to any movement is important, and with live-on-the-scene information, this history becomes more concrete. Other users start noticing the conversation and actions being taken, want to take part, and your movement grows.



Figure 2 Example Tweet

Above is an example for what we will dissect as the anatomy of a tweet. You'll see it is confined to the 140 characters allotted. What are those blue words with the # symbol in front? Those are called *Hashtags*. They can be used to easily tag a tweet as dealing with a certain topic or issue, and make it easier to search for tweets on the subject. A lot of times campaigns or events will use with specific hashtags, which help to bring unity to the various conversations on twitter. You will also notice a short link from the service bit.ly. This is one of the most popular URL shortening services out there, and the links can be customized to fit your campaign. For instance, bit.ly/fairtradewku could have been used to link to an online petition or YouTube video on the campaign. It is all about packing rich and meaningful content that is appealing to your audience in the 140 characters allotted.

To help out with all the services, there are a lot of great software clients out there to help you manage your tweets, keep up with your followers, and present a united social media front across all of the various social media services. We will discuss these later once we talk about Facebook, as these tools often allow you to update both. You can time your updates to come out at specific times. There are all kinds of useful applications out there that can turn your organizing into an even more creative and exciting experience.

140 characters to change the world! Think you can handle it? Twitter deserves a chance if you have shied away in the past. There is a lot there for us in the activist community, so give it a whirl and I think you will like what you find. So tweet away my web activists! Now on to more familiar territory for all of us, that addiction of a social media community, Facebook...

CHAPTER 4

FACEBOOK

500 million active users! Talk about a massive audience at your disposal.

Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, and originally intended for a college audience, Facebook has become the social network of choice and is now a staple of college life (Facebook, 2011). There seem to be very few people who aren't on Facebook in the college setting these days, including professors and even university presidents. No longer do we ask first for someone's phone number to stay in touch, instead we search them out on Facebook and send a friend request. But how do we take Facebook beyond the hours of getting lost creeping that cute girl in your English class' photos, checking to see if she has a boyfriend, and move that into our interested use, progressive social change?

One lesson I learned with Facebook was in setting up my own social network for my activist group WKUAID. While there was limited use and adoption there, the better option was to come where the people already were, Facebook. To be most effective, integrate your campaign into the one space where most college students spend time everytime they log on to the internet, even if they are supposed to be doing homework.

Building a **Facebook Page** for your group or campaign is a good way to put a public face to others and encourage individuals to "like" you. They will then receive

whatever content you push out into their news feed. This should be rich content as well, like videos, pictures, or links to sites that will be engaging. By having this legitimacy of an official page, you can then, with your individual core group, share the content that is posted by the page to expand its reach. Also, making sure you and your core group remember to interact with the page is a good way to boost the likelihood that a story will be placed prominently on others news feeds. This is due to the complex algorithms Facebook uses to determine when and where a story is displayed. It may seem narcissistic, but it is important, and it is for the benefit of your good cause.

The *Facebook Causes* application is another way to integrate into the Facebook experience, and is a place to share information about your cause with people who might be more inclined to take deeper action than the average user. This is due to the fact that they are looking specifically at the Causes application, which means they probably have a similar mindset and passion level as you. Facebook Causes is also a space where you can raise money easily for your campaign or group.

But what about the average user? It is my opinion that there are many out there who do care, but just either don't have the time to be that engaged on your issue, or are engaged on other issues on a deeper level, but can only be limitedly involved on your issue. These people are the best to reach through social media and Facebook. When you share links to a petition or some action alert like calling Congress, you will start to see patterns of who responds to your requests. You can further target your actions to make sure you engage them, and further activate them to become core members of your group. You will start to see what people in your campus community respond to, and further develop your own strategy. In my experience, the richer the content, the more likely for

there to be a response, so a post that is simply a status update won't typically do as well as a link with a picture or video to some other content on the web. This is great as well, as it can lead people to your own website or other sites that can further engage them beyond Facebook's limits for content type.

Facebook Events is an obvious choice for getting people out, with the ability to share event details such as description, time, location, and the ability for RSVPs from invitees. The problem with these is that they have become so commonplace that you really need to do a lot to catch the eye of the invitee, as well as follow up with messages to all of those listed as "attending" with reminders as your event approaches. Also, never count on the number of Facebook confirmed people. Following up with people, and reaching out personally to those of your friends who said they would attend, adds a lot more assurance that they will come out. Events can also be useful in a petition or action that can be taken at any time, as they can easily be sent out to more people with instructions on exactly what to do. For example, you could set up an event for a weeklong call-in to your local member of Congress. Listing the phone number, some talking points, etc. makes for a great space to house and promote a successful advocacy action.

One of the greatest new features that Facebook has released recently is the **New Groups** feature. While the groups in the past would include thousands of people, were separated from your notifications, and overall very ineffective, new groups takes collaboration for our purposes to advance to the next level. You can create one of these new groups for your core constituency, say 20 people. Within that space you can post photos, links, documents, etc. for collaboration. You can even have a group chat with all of the members who are online. When someone posts in the group, you are sent a

notification, can go read their post, which, for example, might be a question about who can volunteer to pass out literature and get petition signatures tomorrow. You are free and post in response along with three others who are free, and suddenly you have built a ground crew instantly for your work. You set up a meeting time, figure out who is printing the materials all without leaving the comfort of Facebook, a space where almost everyone in your group is likely to check within any given 24 hours, if not more frequently.

I have set up many meetings, collaborated on event details, etc. using these new groups in the few months since it became available. Figure 3 below shows one example of such an interaction. One thing that is most important about social media for activism is that it takes the productivity out of the usual hour-long meeting, and puts it in an accessible space where you can work when you are available and actually get things done in between regular meetings. If you are a leader of a group like this, you'll probably share my feelings about delegating tasks, both as a way to reduce your workload, but to have leadership growth and added commitment and growth of group identity. Facebook groups give you the opportunity to connect quickly and check on how tasks are going and allows for questions or details to be ironed out so the tasks can be completed effectively. There is also the added bonus of community building, with more interactions over Facebook as a way to increase comfort levels in interaction during regular meetings, which hopefully blossoms on into close relationships and friendships. A strong activist community is one that is unified and there is a sense of camaraderie. In my experience you are way more effective if there is a strong mix of productivity and community.



Molly [\[Profile\]](#)

Hey!

Anyone want to get together tomorrow night for a working meeting? What times would work? Where would work? Matt's house is always an option, or we can find a place on campus...

about 3 weeks ago · Like · Comment · Unsubscribe



Elizabeth [\[Profile\]](#) I have class from 5:30 to 8:15, but I can be there afterward. And Matt's sounds fine.

March 14 at 9:35pm · Like



Charlie Harris Yeah, let's do Matt's, maybe 7 for those not going to Wii Bowling?

March 14 at 9:36pm · Like



Charlie Harris Or have class :-P Elizabeth, haha

March 14 at 9:36pm · Like



Elizabeth [\[Profile\]](#) Haha, as long as people are still there working, I'll come.

March 14 at 9:37pm · Like



Abby [\[Profile\]](#) Sounds good. I can be there around 7:30 or 8. I'll let you know for sure tomorrow.

March 14 at 11:17pm · Like



Meg [\[Profile\]](#) I can be there at 7:30 too. I can drive.

March 15 at 7:40am · Like

Write a comment...

Figure 3 Facebook Group Collaboration Example

CHAPTER 5

GOOGLE

Google...think about that word for a second. It has become a household name about a new idea that we have embraced and is our new reality. No longer do we have to pour over encyclopedias for out of date information. We now have access to any piece of information almost instantly. While there are multiple search engines out there, Google is the one that defined that category, and is now a symbol of the information age. It opened up the Internet and made it accessible to all. The age of the super-empowered individual is upon us. We have access to the wealth of human knowledge, and can use it to make us more productive. If you are connected to the Internet, you can learn practically anything, from how to fix your car or tie a necktie, to human rights law or how to run for elected office. The latter examples are cases of how access to the net can improve the lives of those living in impoverished areas of the developed or developing world.

With that in mind, Google didn't stop at making the best search engine in the world. There are many Google tools that are very useful to the activist community. The first one most people are familiar with is *Gmail*, a free, ever expanding email service that is easy to use and seems to never run out of space to keep emails. Within this service, there are the abilities to create and maintain your contacts in various categories, from

your core group to your longer listserv. These can be used to notify about events and actions. Gmail is kind of the gateway into the rest of the Google Apps suite.

Before going further into these apps, let me note that you can create a branded experience in most of these services for free if you own a domain name for your group or cause. By branded experience, I mean that the tools will have your logo, your domain name, etc. within them, which lends to a more legitimate and personalized experience for your users. For example, we have wkuaid.org as a registered domain and website, and by registering this with **Google Apps**, there is the ability to create up to 50 email accounts for free. I, along with my other group leaders, have personal email accounts that give us further legitimacy (i.e. charlie@wkuaid.org is my account). Aside from giving you more credibility as a legitimate organization, one on par with established nonprofits and businesses, giving your leaders these organization specific emails adds further group identity and adds to their own personal positive perception as being part of a “legit” group.

So you have your branded Gmail for your group, with your logo where the Gmail logo would usually be, but what else is there? First up, there is **Google Calendar**. Here you can collaborate on posting group events along with sharing them and embed them in your website. Others can contribute and you can get a clear sense of where your group is going and where it has been with a clear visible list of past and future events. Once again, it adds to the narrative. Some other handy tools are **Google Alerts** and **Google Reader**, which allow you to aggregate news on topics that might help you in your advocacy work. Google Reader allows subscribing to various news sources and topics by aggregating them in one place to view at your leisure. Google Alerts is a neat service in which you

can receive an email notification when certain words or phrases are used across the web. So if you want to know every time “Foreign Aid Reform” comes up on the news and blogs, you would setup an alert, which would send you an email as frequently as you setup with those results.

Now to my favorite tool... **Google Docs**. Instant collaboration in real time where you can create, view, and edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations with your peers. For example, working on a sample letter to Congress you need to get out to your members for tabling in the morning, jump on a Google Doc with a fellow organizer and quickly work together to create a letter that would have taken various email exchanges for edits etc., or even in person penning in the past. You can do this with budget spreadsheets for your events so that everyone can always have access to an updated budget when they need it.

Another recent feature is **Google Forms**, which allows you to quickly create web forms for any use from conference registration to surveys. This is the easiest and most customizable petition creator ever made! You can reach people on their computer by sharing the link on Facebook or Twitter with a petition that has your language and specific questions, so, for example, you could get a signer’s name and email and ask them to check a box if they would like to be added to your listserv for campaign updates. You can see an example of a Google Form below in Figure 4. It propagates the responses in a Google spreadsheet on the backend that you can view, export to excel and print for your meetings with officials to show your number of supporters. All of this done with little work required on the part of the signer, but that gives you that extra boost of constituent

power. It also makes a great way to have volunteers sign up for your events, and even more uses that you will find as you begin to work with the service.

This suite of Google Apps are high quality professional tools that are available for free!

Fair Trade WKU Declaration

Sign on to add your voice and say that you want WKU to become a Fair Trade University

* Required

Name *

Please put your first and last name

Email Address *

Please use a valid email address

Would You Like To Volunteer?

Yes

Submit

Figure 4 Sample Google Form Petition

CHAPTER 6

SHARING TIPS & OTHER COOL SERVICES

There are a lot of other really cool other services out there, so I will mention those now with some brief descriptions and uses I have found for them. One we mentioned earlier was the timed update services. These allow you to specifically set time and day that a certain post goes out to your followers or friends. Say you are organizing a flash mob creative stunt that you want to get people to attend, but don't want to give it away too soon so that the surprise is lacking or it will be shut down prematurely. You can set up timed updates where a blast is sent out 15 minutes before the appointed time to all of your social networks, all of this while you are busy making last minute preparations and don't have time to worry about social media. Services like *Hootsuite* and *Laterbro* are some of the most popular in this category; check them out! We also talked briefly about *bit.ly*, as a URL shortening service, and there are others as well. Shortening your links makes them more accessible and easier to share. Plus, you can measure your impact by getting real-time analytics as to how many people clicked the links.

Blogging and personal websites can be interesting additions to your activism. They can further legitimize your work by creating a space of your internet “real-estate” that you have complete control over, unlike Facebook or Twitter. *Wordpress* and *Tumblr*

are two of the more popular blogging services and are highly customizable to your needs. You can continue to build the narrative of your movement through blogging beyond the short form of status updates and tweets. Having multiple authors adds more perspective and makes blogs more interesting. One touch that is great, if you can find the budget for it, and that is building a personal site for your organization. I built one during the second year of our organization, and it has been a great public face for our campaigns and us.

There are some great services out there that you can build a site with even if you have little to no knowledge about HTML or if that acronym is a different language to you (The funny thing, it is a different language). They use content management where you can basically drag and drop content around, bring in links, and embed photos and YouTube videos. The platform I used for my group is *Spruz*, which is set up as I just described. It's great to be able to give people a legitimate website when they ask for more information about your work. Just remember to integrate your website or blog (even better a combination of the two) with social plugins that allow users to share content back to Twitter and Facebook.

For scheduling meetings, a cool service is *Doodle*, which lets you pick a meeting time based on when works best for all of those who want to attend. You select a series of days and times and it creates a poll, which you can email out. Then, once everyone fills it out, you can see the best time for the most people, and set your meeting then. While I talked about Facebook groups as a way to quickly set up meetings for your core group, this service comes in handy when working with faculty, staff, and administration on your campus. If you are a college activist, it will usually be imperative that you work with more than just students to be effective, so use this tool to enhance that.

Dropbox is a cool service that allows you to sync your files and documents on the Internet, and host those files to share with others. This is handy to get away from emails that may have large attachments, where instead you can share a link to the file that you need to send out, such as a flyer for your members to print out individually for promotion of an event you are hosting. Along those lines, *issuu.com* is another service to host publications in a rich, sleek, and interactive environment. Issuu allows you to upload documents like PDFs for rich views online that you can share out via a link. I have used this with information and action sheets where we can save paper but still present it in an appealing visual format. Especially as the age of tablets emerges, delivering this formerly paper content through services like this will be important.

One of the newest services out there that looks to change the game is called *GroupMe*. It is one of a few emerging group texting services, but one that seems to show the most promise. You can easily setup a group of people with cell phones, and instantly have a group conversation over text message. No need for a smart phone, though they created a great app for iPhone is out there to help you manage your group settings and even change your messages from using text messages to the notification system over the web on your phone. Anyone who sends a message to the group number, which is created when the group begins, will have that sent out to the rest of the group with their name indicated as well. This has all kinds of great uses for coordinating quickly with a group of people. I recently used this to create a group text forum for all of the coordinators at a national conference we were hosting. During the conference, we were able to check on things, coordinate volunteers to perform certain tasks, check on sessions that were running over time, and congratulate everyone on a job well done. The uses over the

weekend were endless. For quick communication and coordinating with groups, this service may well redefine how we organize. How useful could this be for a large-scale protest like those held during the infamous Seattle WTO meetings?

CHAPTER 7

TRENDS

There are three trends to watch in social media that are going to change the nature of our interactions and have serious implications and benefits for our work as student activists. The first is one we have already talked about, but not really defined, and that is the move to “the cloud.” The cloud is the space out there where information is shared and hosted off of the hard drives of our personal computers or other devices. Google Docs and Dropbox are examples of cloud services, which store their information on servers and can be accessed from any other device with an internet connection. It is also in the spirit of collaboration and coordination that the cloud will benefit us. As with Facebook Groups, this new ability to work more effectively in between official meetings can increase the effectiveness of student activists, especially when those technologies are accessible and convenient for us and others.

Location, location, location. You have probably started to notice around the social media sphere people starting to use location-based services. *Foursquare* was one of the first to take this one, with people checking in to earn badges, and starting to bridge the gap between the web world and the physical world. Soon these services started working with businesses to get deals like free food or discounts as a way to reward frequent

customers. This is becoming even more mainstream with Facebook's recent adoption in its new product, *Facebook Places*. You can put your campaign literally on the map by checking in at a certain space and calling on others to come join you. Using your location as a way to coordinate with others will be a great addition to the new creative protests and stunts that today's student activists will perform. It has already proved itself as a powerful tool in disaster relief efforts, and you will be hearing more about this emerging trend in the near future. At the time in which I am writing this, Facebook has just announced a new feature for Facebook Places in which you can check-in to Facebook Events, which increases promotion and recognition of your events in your network



Figure 5 QR Code

Have you ever seen one of the funny looking images like the one above? If not you will soon enough! It's called a QR (Quick Response) code. Want to find out how it works? Get out your cell phone, go ahead, do it now! If you have a smart phone download a QR reader in your respective app store, just search 'QR code' and many options will appear. Once you have downloaded the app, open it up and scan the code above. Don't have a smart phone but have a camera and MMS messaging? Snap a picture

and send it to 524824 to get back the info embedded. QR codes are part of the same trends like location services that connect the virtual and physical world. QR codes seem to intrigue people and they want to know what is on the other side of that black and white box. You can embed links, contact information, Social Media info, or even YouTube videos, which I always find the most exciting. It makes it easy to connect with what you are doing in the physical world with its online presence. For example, I added a QR code onto the advertisements for the national conference around Fair Trade we hosted, which took the person scanning directly to the registration page. This connection between the two worlds and bringing that and transforming it into concrete action is something we activists should start using, and be on the cutting edge of social media with our tool belt.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

As activists, we are often very wrapped up in our work and passions, and we forget that we live in something of a bubble. Thinking about how we can most effectively organize in relation to the rest of our peers who may not be as pumped about curbing climate change, etc. is an important skill, and devoting time to strategizing in this way will make you a more effective organizer. I believe social media can be used for social good. No matter your issue, paying attention to social media trends will help you in your work, and social media tools are probably the best in your modern activist tool belt, especially as a student organizer. Social media is where our peers interact, and we must make it convenient and accessible to engage with them. Don't get upset that they don't come out to your weekly meeting or if all of your 150 "I'm attending" on Facebook don't show up to your film screening on mountaintop removal. The real work we do is to try and effect positive social change, and that comes through strength in numbers and constituent power which we can build through these new outlets of social media, where actors can do so from anywhere at any time. Social media connects us and binds us in new ways, and we now have the opportunity to build our numbers and create great progressive change at all levels, from your University all the way to International Trade

Practice through these great services. So my digitally enlightened activist, keep fighting the good fight!

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