

# Paying to Play: Social Media in Advancement 2016

By Jennifer Mack and Michael Stoner

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A white paper with insight and recommendations from the results of the annual survey on social media strategy in educational advancement.

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# 1. Introduction

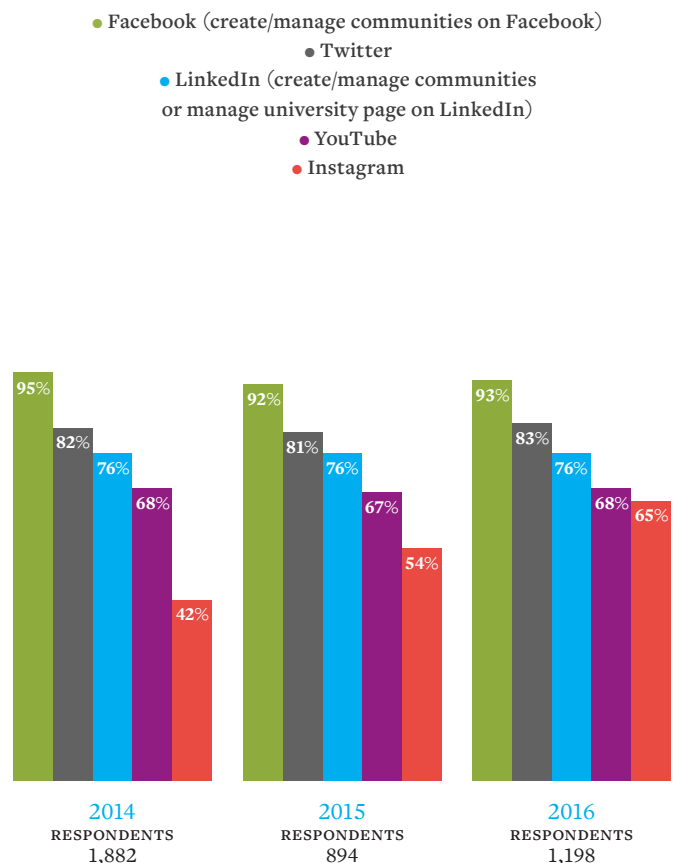
This year, nearly nine out of 10 respondents (86 percent) to the Survey of Social Media in Advancement agreed that social media is a more important part of the communications and marketing mix at their institutions than it was three years ago. But realizing the potential of such significant communication and engagement channels continues to be a challenge.

**Facebook continues to be the single most important social channel for advancement, though many struggle with embracing emerging channels.**

Marketers, social media strategists, and community leaders at schools, colleges, and universities face the same difficulties in making social media work for their organizations as do those in business and at other nonprofits. Chief among these is the necessity of keeping in close touch with changes in specific social channels in order to maintain or increase engagement.

Take, for example, what's happened with Facebook. Until several years ago, if an organization produced great content and worked to increase the number of fans of its page, it could have a reasonable shot at having a high percentage of those fans see its content in their Facebook News Feeds. But as Facebook grew, and its users continued to add friends and “like” more pages, more content than any user could ever see or engage with began showing up in their News Feeds. Organizations that focused their social strategy on Facebook—as higher ed and most independent schools do overwhelmingly—and worked to build large numbers of engaged fans had to develop new strategies for bringing their best content to the attention of their followers.<sup>1</sup> Now, one of the primary strategies for doing this is to “boost” or “promote” posts. We explain more about that, and what schools, colleges, and universities are doing, below. And we offer more detail, and examples, in Section 6.

Figure 1. Top Five Social Media Channels Used in Advancement, 2014–2016



As social media has become more central to the lives of millions around the world, the number of social channels has expanded, and attention among key audiences has become increasingly fragmented. Plus, not only are Facebook users showing more interest in images and video, but Instagram and Snapchat, which facilitate sharing and commenting on images and video, are among the fastest

<sup>1</sup>Josh Constine, “Why Is Facebook Page Reach Decreasing? More Competition and Limited Attention,” TechCrunch, April 3, 2014; [TechCrunch.com/2014/04/03/the-filtered-feed-problem](http://TechCrunch.com/2014/04/03/the-filtered-feed-problem).

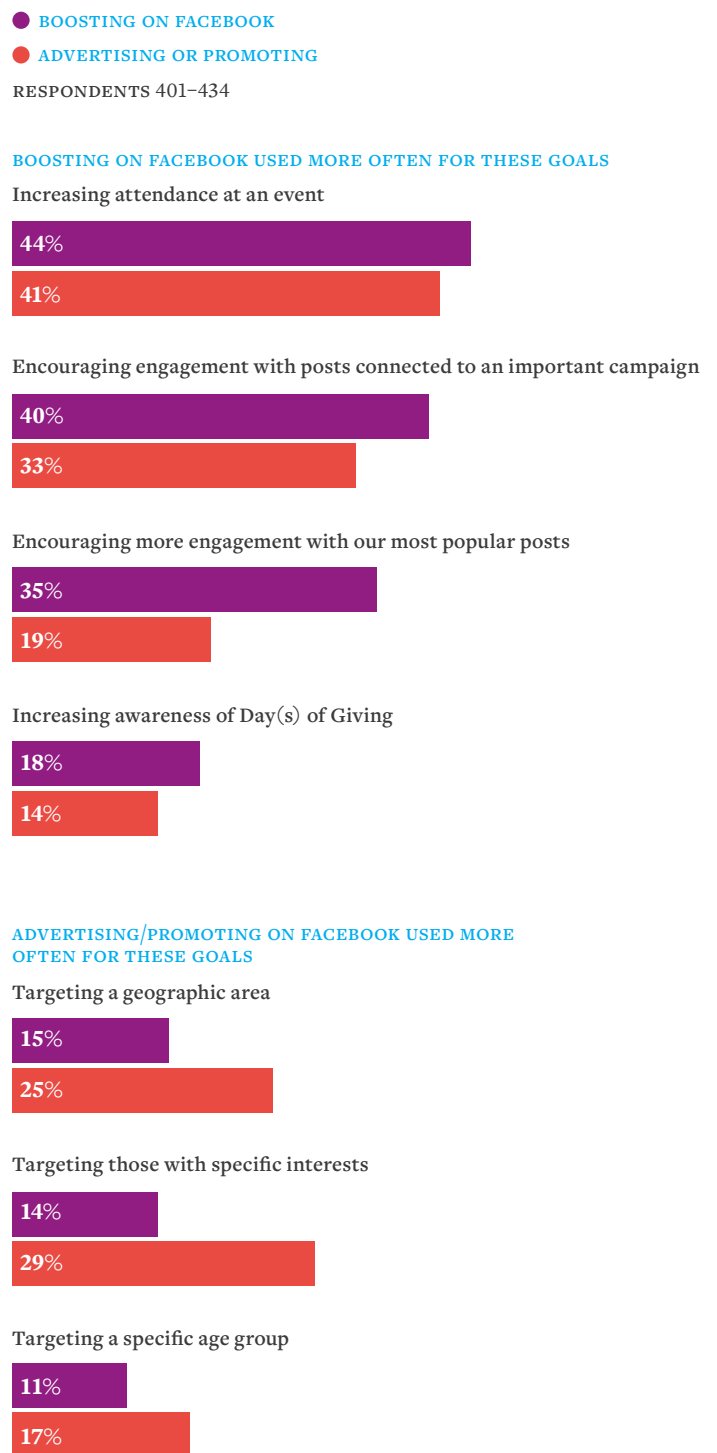
growing social channels, especially among millennials. That demographic, of course, is highly desired by marketers.

While Facebook continues to be the single most important social channel used by school, college, and university marketers and advancement officers, many struggle with how and when to fully embrace emerging social channels. Some of these channels offer the potential to reach particularly desirable demographics, but each requires establishing a presence, producing new types of content, building a following, mastering new rules of engagement, and then engaging. The big decision—in offices that even now are overloaded with managing channels like Facebook and Twitter, where they already reach key audiences—is whether to begin focusing on new channels, and if so, when.

In short, the reality of social channel proliferation, apparent consumer desire for more image and video content, and the growing amount of content being produced and shared on all social channels, both established and emerging, create multiple dilemmas for organizations of all types—and that’s certainly true for schools, colleges, and universities that must compete for attention and mindshare from the audiences they value and seek to motivate. In acknowledgement of these significant challenges, when we put together the research plan for this year’s Survey of Social Media in Advancement, we focused on one of the key ways in which organizations can help their content reach more audience members: boosting or promoting posts—that is, paying to ensure that more fans actually see the posts.

We also continued to ask about the role of social media in fundraising, especially with regard to giving days and crowdfunding. (A giving day is a 24-hour fundraising event in which staff, volunteers, and donors attempt to raise money. Crowdfunding is Kickstarter-style fundraising, often used in education to raise smaller amounts of money for a specific purpose.) And we continue to track what successful institutions are doing with their social media strategies that sets them apart from those that are less successful.

**Figure 2. Why Respondents Boost, Promote, and Advertise Posts on Facebook**



## 2. Pay to Play: Boosting, Promoting, and Advertising on Social Media

This year, the top five social channels used by schools, colleges, and universities are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram. (See Figure 1.) Of these, Instagram has only lately established itself in this group, with its use growing noticeably over the past three years, while that of the other four channels has stayed fairly steady.

Typically, a key strategy organizations have used to build up their audiences and engagement on any of these channels is to post content that is widely appealing to fans and followers, hoping that a large number of people would see, “like,” and further circulate the post. This is called “organic reach”: the total number of unique people who were shown a post through *unpaid* distribution.

You still want to post great content on these social channels and hope that your audiences will see it. But the chances that it will reach them are more limited than ever. Beginning in late 2013, marketers began to see organic reach on Facebook decline. As a result, many commercial, nonprofit, and higher ed social strategists began to “boost” or “promote” Facebook posts in order to have them seen by larger numbers of their audience members. Boosting and promoting are similar: In each case, you pay to have your content appear in the News Feeds of your fans. When you *promote* a post, though, you have more choices for targeting your content using Facebook’s advertising tools.

As organic reach declines across all channels, paying to improve exposure is the single best way to ensure that a particular piece of content reaches as many fans and followers as possible, allowing them the opportunity to engage with it in some way.

Today, a majority of respondents to our survey (83 percent) are boosting or promoting posts or advertising on Facebook; 16 percent are advertising or promoting tweets on Twitter; 9 percent report advertising on LinkedIn, and only 5 percent place sponsored updates there.

### Boosting/Promoting/Advertising on Facebook

It’s not surprising that many schools, colleges, and universities that boost, promote, or advertise do so on Facebook, because that’s where the largest communities are concentrated. However, as one survey respondent noted, “I am personally slightly cynical about being ushered toward paid posts by Facebook itself, which seems to be deliberately limiting the reach of ‘organic’ content. I know from experience that paid posts may have further reach, but they don’t always reach the people that you want them to reach, even if you are meticulous in your targeting parameters.” While boosting a post is simple to do, promoting is more like Facebook advertising, offering more targeting, pricing, and bidding options via Facebook’s excellent advertising tools, but for posted content rather than a specially designed ad.

Why do institutions boost or promote posts? There are a number of reasons—and they use different tactics depending on what they’re trying to achieve. (See Figure 2 for specifics.)

For example, respondents used *both* boosting and promoting (or advertising) as tactics to increase attendance at events: “When registrations for events are lagging, we often decide to boost or promote a post linking to either the ticketing site or to a related article promoting the event,” wrote one respondent.

They typically use the higher-priced, more precise targeting capabilities that promoting and advertising offer to bring messages to the attention of people in a certain geographic area or those with a specific interest. In contrast, boosting is used as a tactic where posts are designed for a broader audience and contain messages of more general interest, such as those connected with a campaign or something of unique importance to many in the institution. One respondent talked about boosting posts “that have exceptionally strong organic engagement as a way to increase awareness of our presence and to further the reach of posts that are tied to strategic directives.”

Not every post is worth boosting, though: 68 percent of respondents said they boost fewer than 20 percent of their posts. There are exceptions, though; as one respondent noted, “Because the organic reach of posts continues to plummet, we boost almost all of our posts.”

Most institutions don’t yet have much, if any, budget for boosting. (One respondent remarked: “Budget ... that’s funny.”) However, others are beginning to think ahead: “I plan a specific dollar amount for each program/event campaign on the calendar, an extra percentage for those not-yet-planned programs, plus another percent specifically for accelerating successful content.”

It’s important to remember, though, that boosting works best if you ensure that a post is already engaging and put some effort into using other approaches to bring it to the attention of your audiences. This may involve email or activating a network of ambassadors to help to spread the word. (There’s more about the use of ambassadors below.) One survey respondent offered these good tips for all posts: “(1) Relate research directly to people’s lives. (2) Use great photos. (3) Non-academic content performs surprisingly well (the ‘feeling’ of the university/the event, buildings, the evening’s menu, etc.). (4) Make a distribution plan for each post, so colleagues and others somehow related to the content are ready to share. The post’s reach will be much bigger and more relevant.”

### Boosting/Promoting/Advertising on Twitter and LinkedIn

While Twitter and LinkedIn are both considered to be important channels by advancement and marketing communications professionals, few respondents to our survey are using their capabilities for advertising or promotion of tweets (in the case of Twitter) or sponsored updates or advertising (on LinkedIn). (See Figure 3.)

Only 16 percent advertise or promote tweets on Twitter; 9 percent report advertising on LinkedIn, and only 5 percent place “sponsored updates” on that channel.

Of those who do advertise or promote their tweets, 48 percent said they do it to encourage more engagement with posts connected to an important campaign; 32 percent are targeting those with specific interests; and 26 percent are trying to increase attendance at an event.

**Figure 3. Why Respondents Promote Tweets or Advertise or Sponsor Updates on LinkedIn**

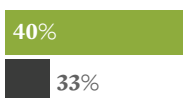
● **ADVERTISE ON LINKEDIN** RESPONDENTS 73  
 ● **PROMOTE TWEETS** RESPONDENTS 136

**PROMOTING ON TWITTER USED MORE OFTEN FOR THESE GOALS**

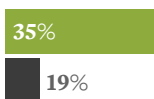
Encouraging engagement with posts connected to an important campaign



Encouraging more engagement with our most popular posts



Increasing awareness of Day(s) of Giving



**ADVERTISING ON LINKEDIN USED MORE OFTEN FOR THESE GOALS**

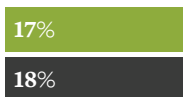
Targeting those with specific interests



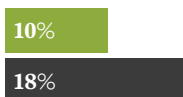
Increasing attendance at an event



Targeting a geographic area



Targeting a specific age group



# 3. Social Media and Fundraising

Last year, we asked respondents to the Survey of Social Media in Advancement a series of questions about several newer approaches to fundraising—giving days and crowdfunding—that rely heavily on social media for their success.<sup>2</sup> We also probed about other roles that social media played in fundraising. We asked some of these same questions again this year—and added a few others—and observed slight upward movement in the percentages of institutions adopting these approaches.

## Giving Days and Crowdfunding

In 2016, the number of respondents who reported that their institution had established a giving day was up slightly. (As a reminder, a giving day—sometimes called a “day of giving”—is a 24-hour fundraising event, often held on a day of significance to an institution, like the anniversary of its founding, in which staff, volunteers, and donors attempt to raise money.) In 2015, 42 percent of respondents reported that their institution had run a giving day. In 2016, that increased to 46 percent. (See Figure 4.)

This year, 10 percent of institutions reported raising more than \$1 million through a giving day. (See Figure 5.) In addition, 38 percent of respondents said they considered their event to be “very successful” or “a model” for a successful day(s) of giving. Only 18 percent rated theirs “not at all” or “not very” successful.

We also asked about crowdfunding. (Crowdfunding is Kickstarter-style fundraising, often used in education to raise smaller amounts of money for a specific purpose like a small faculty research project, a student project, or an activity of some kind.) This year, 18 percent of respondents had experimented with crowdfunding, up from 15 percent of respondents last year. While the most-used platform by those who hosted crowdfunding campaigns was Scalefunder, a few used Crowdfunder and a few even built their own platforms.

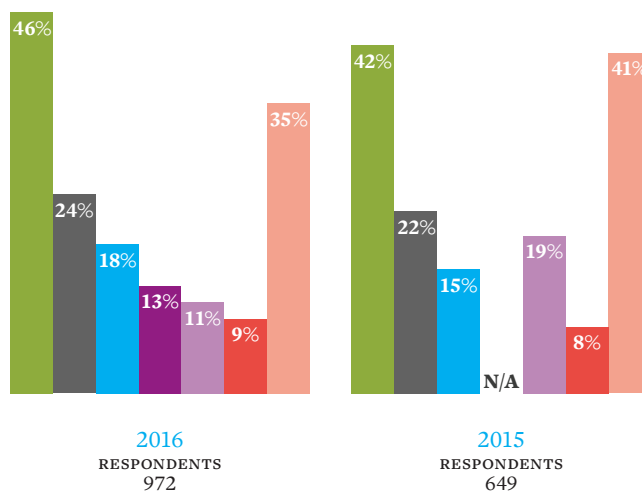
Of institutions that reported crowdfunding initiatives, two-thirds (67 percent) sought to raise money for one to five projects; 18 percent sought funding for more than 10.

**In 2016, 46 percent of institutions sponsored a giving day, up from 42 percent in 2015.**

**Figure 4. Fundraising Approaches Currently Used, Compared to 2015**

- Day(s) of Giving
- Strong use of social media ambassadors (alumni or others who are recruited to help promote our social initiatives)
- Crowdfunding/microfunding/Kickstarter-style fundraising
- Thank a Giver Day\*
- Student engagement philanthropy month
- Facebook direct giving button
- None of the above

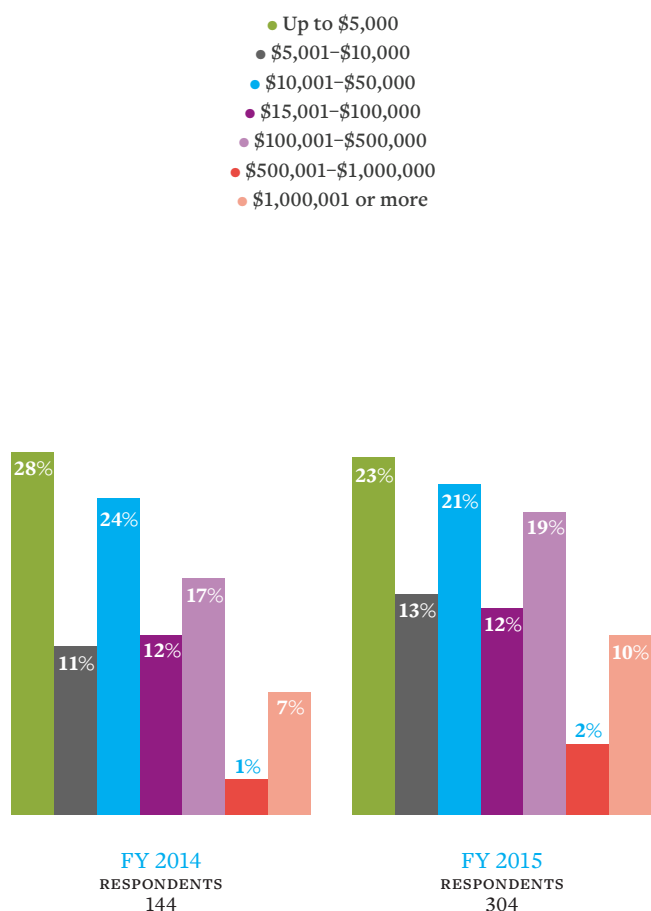
\*Added in 2016 survey.



<sup>2</sup>Our 2015 white paper, “Refining, Prioritizing, Expanding: Social Media and Advancement in 2015,” provided in-depth explorations of both giving days and crowdfunding initiatives in the body of the paper and in appendices. Download a copy at [bit.ly/CASESocial15](http://bit.ly/CASESocial15).



**Figure 5. Money Raised Through Giving Day Events in FY 2015, Compared to FY 2014**



And most considered their initiatives to be successful: 59 percent said they were “somewhat successful”; 23 percent said they were “very successful”; and 6 percent considered their initiatives to be “a model” of successful crowdfunding.

### Lessons Learned About Giving Days and Crowdfunding

While the numbers of institutions reporting that they are using these approaches haven’t grown dramatically in a year, it’s clear from respondents’ comments that they have learned some important lessons from their experiences in establishing and conducting giving days and crowdfunding campaigns. Planning, passion, persistence, and cross-channel marketing are keys to success.

**PLANNING.** Coordination across campus is essential for success. One respondent commented, “Plan ahead! Day of Giving is a BIG project. I would say it ranks as the second biggest project our office puts together, behind our Alumni Weekend. We had a very heavy lift close to the day of giving. If we had spread the work out more, it would have had less effect on the workflow in our office during the weeks leading up.”

**PASSION.** Engaging volunteers is essential to the success of both giving days and crowdfunding initiatives. But passion is especially vital for the latter. As a respondent noted: “The campaigns only meet their goals when the people running them are very passionate and engaging.”

**PERSISTENCE.** As one respondent explained, “The biggest challenge with these programs is the learning curve for the group who are raising the money for their efforts. Many (especially students) don’t understand the time and effort required to implement crowdfunding, and this can take some time to teach and motivate them to do what is required for success.”

**MARKETING.** While social media plays a key role in publicizing giving days and crowdfunding campaigns, by itself it is not sufficient to carry the day with ambassadors and potential donors. Social media is a great way to spread the word: “We used social media boosted/promoted posts for the first time during this campaign and saw how valuable it was for awareness,” one respondent wrote. But a multi-channel approach is essential for success. As another commenter explained, “Our social media posts were the main driver to the Day of Giving page, but we noticed that the best results on actual giving came from people exposed to more than one touchpoint (where social media was one of the interactions, not in isolation).”

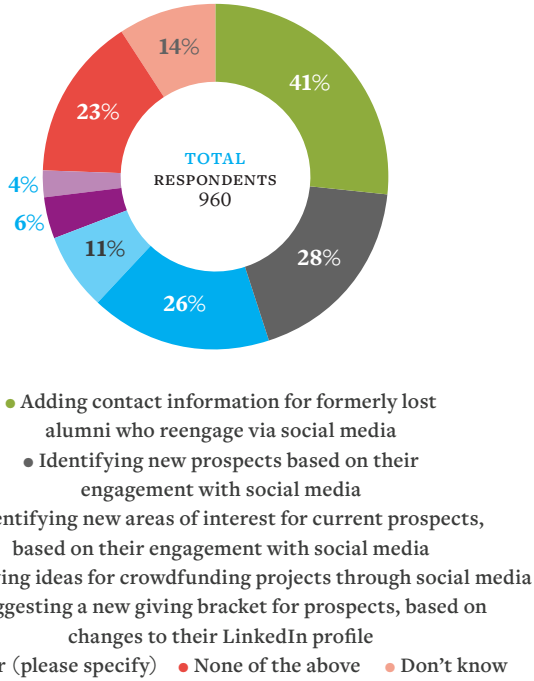
Email, in particular, is crucial. Another respondent remarked, “Email was and always is our biggest breadwinner for these campaigns. Last year we doubled the amount of email solicitations and saw double the gifts, with less than 1 percent of people opting out of emails.”

### The Role of Volunteers

This year, 22 percent of respondents reported making “strong use” of social media ambassadors. This is important because a well-developed and engaged network of ambassadors can help institutions further their social media goals in a large variety of ways, from helping to ensure that



Figure 6. How Institutions Use Social Media for Prospect Research and Other Fundraising-Related Purposes



THE MOST SUCCESSFUL INSTITUTIONS MORE COMMONLY USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PROSPECTING

- MOST SUCCESSFUL RESPONDENTS 304
- LESS SUCCESSFUL RESPONDENTS 653

Identifying new areas of interest for current prospects, based on their engagement with social media



Identifying new areas of interest for current prospects, based on their engagement with social media



important announcements and posts get in front of their own networks to actively participating in days of giving and crowdfunding campaigns.

One respondent noted: “The use of volunteers has been key. Not only have our volunteers encouraged giving, but we have done engagement efforts in the month leading up to the challenge, like a photo-a-day project that focused on one word—volunteers would post photos or stories on their own social media pages of what that word meant to them related to the college and add our hashtag. We curated everything on Storify and had the Storify feed embedded on our donor challenge page. Some incredible stories were shared, it caught fire with their friends, parents, etc. getting in on the fun, and hundreds of posts (that we could see anyway) were shared just talking about how awesome our college is. And compelling hearts to give, as we saw 3,500 donors step forward that day.”

Still, just engaging people as ambassadors often isn’t sufficient for success. A respondent pointed out the need for ongoing education about what institutions need from their ambassadors: “Drumming up support via social media was resource-heavy. We found that it was very easy to get influ-

ential people to help spread the word, but very few people actually donated. They seemed to think that they had done their bit simply by sharing posts about the project.”

Other Fundraising Applications

We also asked about other ways in which social media was being used to augment fundraising in some way. Most institutions (41 percent) reported using social media to add contact information for formerly lost alumni. And some reported using it for various other types of prospect research. (See Figure 6 for details.)

Other ways in which respondents reported using social media to support development goals included sharing donor and scholarship stories, sharing news and updates, thanking donors, and testing stories that would be used in fundraising appeals. And one respondent described a particularly interesting project: “We’ve worked with our alumni and development teams to design and launch a new program called ‘Alumni Advantage.’ The program includes access to free online education, expanded access to livestreamed content on our YouTube channel, hybrid in-person/social media events with faculty members across the world, and much more.”

## 4. What Does Success Look Like?

Over the past seven years of this research, it's been fascinating to observe how the responses to questions about success with social media have changed—and what those who say they are successful do (and don't do) as compared to those who rate their institutions as less successful. Of course, it's important to say that success is often in the eye of the beholder, and we ourselves have struggled to develop questions that would measure success by some more objective standards. Some institutions have good answers to the question about whether they are successful with social media. For example, staff at Columbia University can describe how various social channels contribute to the success of Columbia Giving Day, which in 2015 raised \$12,788,367 (see [GivingDay.Columbia.edu](http://GivingDay.Columbia.edu)).

But social strategists at other institutions may have other objectives for their social media: for example, raising the profile of specific university programs. It's often more difficult to measure how successful social media has been in cases like these. In fact, social media marketers in business, often assumed to be more attuned to metrics in general, have a difficult time measuring the impact of their efforts, too. Of the more than 5,000 respondents to a 2016 survey of marketers conducted by Social Media Examiner, only 41 percent agreed with the statement, "I am able to measure the return on investment (ROI) for my social media activities."<sup>3</sup>

This year, we asked respondents to tell us how they talked about the value of social media to their leaders. The specific question was "In your opinion, which of the following claims is most helpful in convincing your institutional leaders of the value of social media?" See Figure 7 for responses, broken down in various ways.

Note that dollars raised is not a significant measure for the value of social media at most institutions. In contrast, connecting with new audiences is (45 percent of institutions overall cite this as an important claim to make to justify success), as is engaging young alumni (42 percent).

One respondent noted how important it is to mix success stories with facts and data: "Steady growth in the number of followers. Engagement levels that exceed those of many peer and aspirant universities. Individual examples of particular posts that attract significant engagement."

Another wrote,

*My "stories" consist of statistical, factual information that I know my administration will trust. For students, social media is where they are, and I use reports and information like what this survey might collect to encourage leaders to put more resources into this area. We have to go there to reach students where they are. The digital realm is where they get information. We have to exist there to connect with them.*

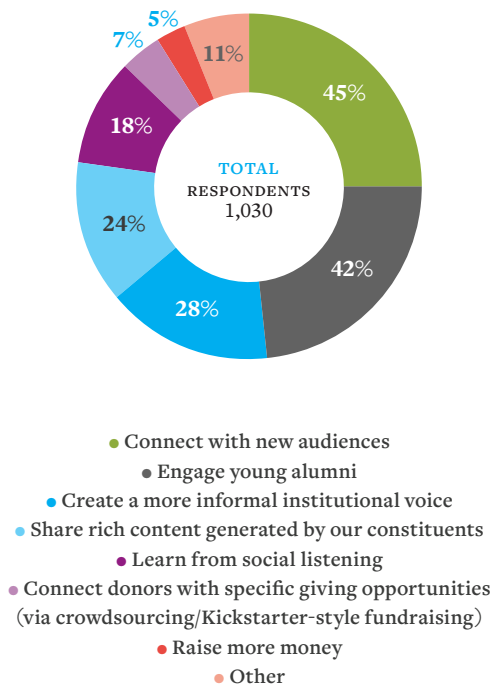
*I also share trends and how things have moved to point us in the direction in which we need to move. When I first started, we focused on Facebook. Since then, at least for students, our attention has moved from Facebook to Twitter and from Twitter to Instagram, and we're looking into using Snapchat more as well.*

### How Successful Institutions Differ

Each year, we also take a close look at institutions that claim to be highly successful at using social media and what they do that's different from those considered less successful. This year, 32 percent of respondents described their units as "very successful" or even "a model" in using social media. We defined these as the most successful institutions for comparison purposes. Of the rest, 58 percent said they were "somewhat successful" in their use of social media; 9 percent rated their institutions as "not very successful"; and 1 percent as "not at all successful."

<sup>3</sup> "Measuring Social Media ROI," 2016 *Social Media Marketing Industry Report*, May 2016, p. 9; [SocialMediaExaminer.com/report2016](http://SocialMediaExaminer.com/report2016).

Figure 7. Claims That Are Most Helpful in Convincing Leaders of Social Media's Value



THE MOST SUCCESSFUL LISTEN MORE

● MOST SUCCESSFUL RESPONDENTS 304  
 ● LESS SUCCESSFUL RESPONDENTS 653

● K-12  
 ● HIGHER EDUCATION

● PUBLIC  
 ● PRIVATE

Share rich content generated by our constituents



Share rich content generated by our constituents



Learn from social listening



Learn from social listening



Learn from social listening



One way in which the most successful institutions differ from less successful ones is that they're engaged on more channels—and especially on emerging channels, the best example of which is Snapchat. According to our data, 26 percent of the most successful institutions are using Snapchat; only 10 percent of less successful ones use it.

Indeed, as one respondent remarked: “It’s a constantly shifting space, so what worked one month may not work the next. You have to be nimble and prepared to experiment.” That includes experimenting on your existing channels, like Facebook, as well as emerging channels like Snapchat.

Here are some other common practices of institutions rated as most successful with social media:

**1. They're more likely to boost, promote, and advertise their posts:** 54 percent of those that are most successful boost their Facebook posts; only 37 percent of those that are less successful follow this practice. And 51 percent promote or advertise their Facebook posts, in contrast to 32 percent of those that are less successful. They're also nearly three times as likely to promote tweets or advertise on Twitter (26 percent of most successful institutions do this; only 9 percent of less successful institutions do).

**2. Most successful institutions are more likely to share content generated by their constituents on social channels** (30 percent vs. 21 percent) and more likely to use social media to listen to constituents (25 percent vs. 15 percent).

**3. The most successful are likely to use social media for prospect research,** identifying new prospects based on their engagement with social media and identifying new areas of interest for current prospects based on their engagement in social media.

**4. The most successful institutions are adept at turning their expertise in using social media into dollars for their institutions.** For example, they're more likely to have days of giving (52 percent vs. 44 percent of less successful institutions), and more likely to make strong use of social media ambassadors in their initiatives (33 percent vs. 20 percent).

# 5. Demographics

We conducted this year’s online survey among a random sample of 18,403 CASE members in the United States and globally, receiving 1,198 responses across all types of institutions. Of U.S. and Canadian residents, 40 percent of the respondents work in doctoral, research, or master’s institutions, 30 percent in four-year colleges, and 17 percent in independent schools. Figures 8, 9, 10, and 11 provide a breakdown of the demographics of our respondents.

Figure 8. Respondents to 2016 Survey: Location

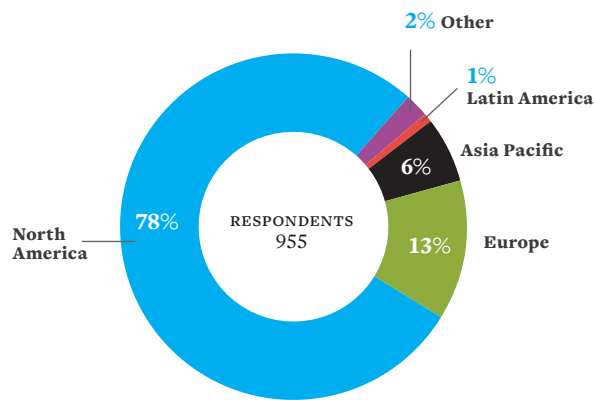


Figure 9. Respondents to 2016 Survey: Area of Advancement

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBE YOUR UNIT, THAT IS, YOUR IMMEDIATE DEPARTMENT OR DIVISION? PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

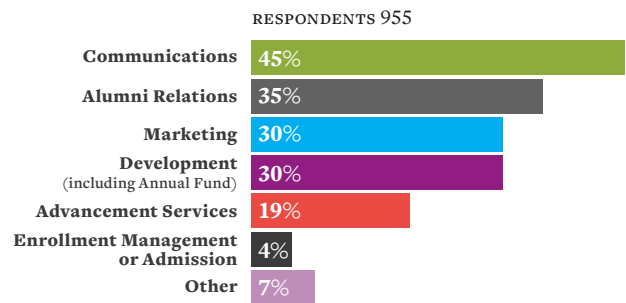
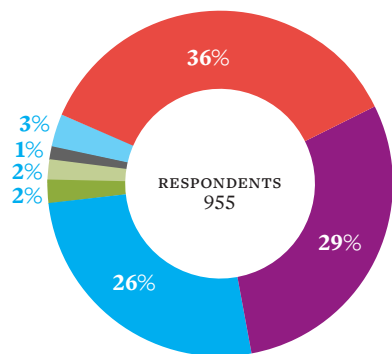


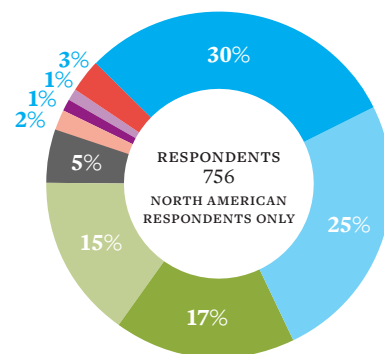
Figure 10. Respondents to 2016 Survey: Level of Professional Role



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBES THE LEVEL OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL ROLE?

- 36% Executive director, director, or manager
- 29% Associate, assistant, or deputy director/manager
- 26% Specialist, coordinator, or administrative assistant
- 2% Associate or assistant vice president
- 2% Vice president, vice chancellor, or assistant head of school
- 1% President or head of school
- 3% Other
- 0% Dean, associate dean, or assistant dean

Figure 11. Respondents to 2016 Survey: Type of Institution



- 30% Baccalaureate (four-year) college
- 25% Doctoral/research university
- 17% Independent elementary/secondary school
- 15% Master's college or university
- 5% Associate's (two-year) college
- 2% Special focus institution (e.g. stand-alone law school, medical school)
- 1% Institutionally related foundation
- 1% Independent alumni association
- 3% Other
- 0% System office
- 0% Tribal college

## 6. Boosting, Promoting, and Advertising Explained

For years, schools, colleges, and universities have worked hard to create top-notch content for their social channels so that they could grow their audiences and spur engagement on these channels. But today, great content is no longer sufficient: Advertising must become part of an institution's social strategy.

Until recently, the strategy for campus social media strategists was to create content that would appeal to their audiences, figure out the best time to post that content, and hope that the friends, fans, and followers they had worked so hard to cultivate and engage would see that content and share it. They also wanted to encourage continued engagement with their content so that they'd stay top of mind with their audiences.

Often the main goal for these engagement efforts was to increase the number of people within a certain channel who would see a piece of content through *unpaid* distribution. And the hope was that those people would then share it with their own networks on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or elsewhere. If enough people shared it, it could go *viral*—extending far beyond the network where it was originally posted.

For example, a welcome speech by Georgia Tech student Nick Selby went viral on YouTube.<sup>4</sup> The video was extensively covered by the news media (TV, print, and online), and when Georgia Tech posted it on Facebook, it received more than 500,000 views. That kind of visibility offers a real possibility of increasing the number of friends, fans, and followers for the organization that posted the content, expanding name recognition and furthering the spread of its messages.

This is one reason why for a number of years, social media was considered to be “free”: You could, by relying on creativity, hard work, and luck, achieve fairly widespread success. (Of course, it was never really free, because there was a cost for the *people* who created the content, distributed it, and engaged with the friends and fans who responded to that content.)

Now, though, education is facing the reality that great content alone won't inspire audience members to engage with it, since their social channels are typically so full of content that they might not even see an institution's post, tweet, or image. It's necessary to budget for boosting and promoting the most important social content—and to make advertising part of an institution's social strategy.

### Facebook: The Most Important Social Channel

Facebook has long been the most important social network for school, college, and university marketing and advancement. It claims more users worldwide than any other social channel; it captures the bulk of user attention; its users span age groups and other demographics; and it's where most sharing and engagement happen. So it's no accident that more than 90 percent of institutions continue to nurture their Facebook presence, even as other channels arise and gain prominence. (For example, Instagram users are more engaged overall than Facebook users, but Instagram can't boast the huge number of users that Facebook does—though, of course, it's a Facebook property itself.)

One key reason is that Facebook knows how to keep people signed in and engaged with content from their friends, from businesses, and from an increasing number of media outlets and celebrities. The more time people spend on Facebook, the more it knows about its users, the better it can target ads to them, and the more effective those ads are. The more effective Facebook ads are, the more organizations want to use them to reach their audiences. And so it goes.

At one time, organizations that worked hard on their content and attended to audience engagement could count on substantial organic reach. That is, their postings reached a significant number of their audience members through unpaid distribution. They could then hope that some of these audience members would share that content with their own networks, extending its reach.

<sup>4</sup>News.GaTech.edu/features/sophomore-sensation





Great content lends to organic reach, like this photo posted by the Cornell Alumni Association. Juxtaposing the Cornell brand in cities around the world proved to be wildly popular with alumni, parents, and donors.

Many organizations, including businesses as well as schools, colleges, and universities, also used Facebook ads. Facebook ads are very effective because its tools allow an advertiser to closely target messages and offers to a highly specific audience.

So for years, organizations that were using Facebook effectively relied on a strategy that combined great content, some of which would be shared virally, with ads that could be used for purposes such as building their audiences or attracting a larger audience for an event.

That's changed.

Late in 2013, after Facebook changed the algorithm that determines what people see in their News Feed, organic reach dropped precipitously. An organization's post will only show up in the News Feeds of its most committed and engaged fans: those who repeatedly "like" and share its content. The way to reach the bulk of people now is to pay for the exposure.

### Paying to Play: The Options

There are a number of methods for increasing exposure on Facebook. You can boost or promote timeline posts, or you can develop full-blown ad campaigns. Boosting and promoting enable you to expand the number of audience members who will see a post in their Facebook News Feed. Ads offer many more options and significant flexibility in targeting them to reach audience segments.

**BOOSTING POSTS.** Boosted posts are normal page posts—such as a status update, an image or video, or an offer of some kind like an ask for a giving day—that get

additional paid reach. Boosted content appears in your fans' News Feed just like other content. In short, boosting a post can significantly increase its reach (and therefore value). These days, it may be the best and only way for your fans to see important content—without boosting, you may reach 2 to 4 percent of your fans; with boosting, you may reach half or more. The cost for boosting depends on how many people you'd like to reach.

**PROMOTING POSTS.** Promoting is much like boosting in that you're working with a post that appears on your page, but promoting a post gives you more targeting, pricing, and bidding options. With promotion, you get greater reach and, if you need it, the means to target a specific audience. You use Facebook Ads Manager (see below) for this purpose.

**ADVERTISING.** Facebook offers two advertising tools:

- **Ads Manager**, which is best for simpler campaigns, serves a variety of objectives, from promoting a page to sending people to your website to getting video views. What you select is based on your advertising strategy. For example, Jenny Mandeville, content and marketing specialist in Web Communications at Vanderbilt University, uses Facebook ads to target university alumni and donors: "For development and alumni relations, our strategy is mostly ad-based, and we rarely promote timeline posts. Our ads center around chapter events and career-boosting events, since that is what tends to sell with alumni audiences. We also run 'likes' campaigns around commencement, when we have the highest chance of attracting new alumni."

- **Power Editor**, as its name suggests, is designed for advanced users and offers powerful features such as data mining, the ability to save audience groups so you can retarget them, and many others. Though Ads Manager works well for many uses, Power Editor is better for large campaigns and email uploads—matching email addresses on your list with people's Facebook pages. It's also the tool you'd use to do highly targeted advertising based on interests, location, and affiliation.

These tools offer the ability to run highly sophisticated ad campaigns. For example, Cornell staff uploaded 240,000 email addresses from the university's database to Facebook; 108,000 matched addresses of Facebook users. The university could assume that the people whose addresses were in Cornell's database had some relationship with Cornell



and thus were already constituents. By using Facebook’s ad tools, staff could target these people in various ways—a highly efficient form of outreach.

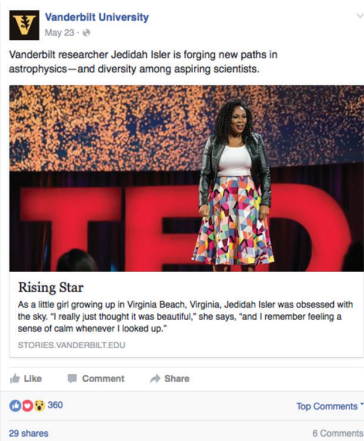
## Strategies for Success

No matter whether you’re boosting, promoting, or advertising on Facebook, social strategists emphasize that what’s important is being clear about your goals and sharing high-quality content in the first place.

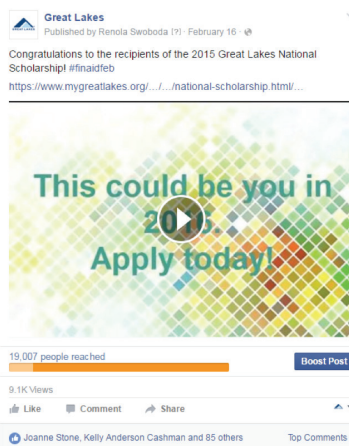
Anna Whinnery, content and marketing specialist at the Peabody College of Education at Vanderbilt, noted that the college’s marketing strategy on Facebook follows its overall content strategy: “Our content strategy consists of promoting content that falls into four buckets: (1) research, (2) our people, (3) on campus, and (4) the Peabody Difference. We make sure that *all* the video content we share fits into one of these four categories.”

It’s also essential to develop high-quality content. Ashley Budd, director of digital marketing at Cornell University, notes that much of the content her institution shares on Facebook consists of photos and videos, since that content plays well with many of Cornell’s audiences. They also aim for something clever or amusing about their images.

When Vanderbilt University boosts posts on the main university Facebook page, Jenny Mandeville chooses posts that are “research-based.” They are generally about “the type of research that supports the university’s academic strategic plan, but that isn’t necessarily going to be a huge hit organically. For example, we wouldn’t promote a video that



Vanderbilt University boosted this post on the main university Facebook page. Jenny Mandeville noted that this post was selected for boosting because “it fits into Vanderbilt’s commitment to diversity, as well as promoting ground breaking research.”



Great Lakes Educational Loan Services, Inc., posted this video to its Facebook page in February, congratulating scholarship recipients. By boosting it, they were able to reach more than 19,000 people and received more than 9,000 views of the video.

is already going viral, but we might promote one that has a strong message that we’d like more people to see.” Vanderbilt boosts one to two posts a month, Mandeville reports, and increased its budget for boosting in its main accounts modestly this year.

So why *wouldn’t* you want to boost a post? Because you may want to reach *some* of your fans, but not *all* of them. For example, Colgate University uses Facebook Ads for a simple reason. As Matt Hames, the university’s communications strategist, points out, “Our Facebook is on the first page for a Google search for ‘Colgate University.’ We don’t want prospective students to see asks. If you boost a post, you gotta make a post, and then it is on your wall.” With advertising, Colgate engages selected fans for whom the message is appropriate. Others don’t see those messages, so prospective students checking out Colgate’s Facebook page aren’t confronted with fundraising asks.


Facebook provides highly efficient options for advertising. Depending on how you structure your campaigns, you can elect a cost-per-click option or page “likes.” Either way, you pay only when you achieve the desired outcome. And you can cap your daily spending and total spending—so you won’t exceed the budget you set for the campaign.

## Advertising on Instagram

It’s important to know that you can also use Facebook’s Ads Manager and Power Editor to advertise on Instagram. Although many education institutions aren’t advertising on Instagram at the moment, it’s a channel that is of growing importance because engagement is high and the biggest

**Great Lakes**  
Written by Liz Gross [?] · November 11, 2015 ·

Six months after leaving school, most students begin repaying their federal loans.



**Student Loan Repayment Options**  
Federal student loans have benefits that allow borrowers to lower their payment amount, postpone payments, or, in certain cases, have their loans forgiven.  
WWW.MYGREATLAKES.ORG

13,799 people reached

Boost Post

Great Lakes Educational Loan Services, Inc., used Facebook Custom Audience to place 12 versions of this post (with varying imagery and copy) to reach out to recent students who had not opened their emails about student loan repayment.

It was not posted organically. (Facebook Custom Audience enables you to create a targeted audience based on data you provide, such as email addresses or Facebook IDs from your database. You can then use Ads Manager or Power Editor to create an ad for that audience.)

Dr. Liz Gross, social media and market research strategist, explained, “We learned that custom audience ads (for us) can be good for awareness or driving website clicks with people who don’t engage via email, but shouldn’t be expected to result in an online conversion through a form, login, etc.”

Budget for the ads was \$2,750, and they were shown to a custom audience of 16,200 with a reach of 13,799, resulting in 810 clicks. That translated to a 5 percent unique CTR (click-through rate) and \$3.40 CPC (cost per click). Although the ad campaign ran for two weeks, most clicks occurred within the first four days.

users—teens and young adults—are desirable and hard to reach through other channels.

### Promoting and Advertising on Twitter

You can also promote tweets on Twitter. Essentially, Twitter says, “Promoted Tweets are ordinary Tweets purchased by advertisers who want to reach a wider group of users or to spark engagement from their existing followers.” In every other respect, promoted tweets are just like regular tweets: You can retweet them, reply to them, and like them.

Like boosted or promoted Facebook posts, promoted tweets are used to attract attention to specific content or messages and to reach a broader group of your followers—or specific kinds of audience members. Businesses use promoted tweets to drive traffic to coupons on their website, publicize sales, and for similar purposes. Colleges could use them to market a giving day or target certain kinds of followers, such as media.

Promoted tweets appear at the top of relevant search pages on twitter.com or in the timelines of Twitter users if the tweet is relevant to that user. You can target your entire Twitter following or a group within that following.

As Matt Hames at Colgate University noted, “You’re now able to advertise on Twitter to a custom audience based on

email addresses. We used Twitter for a March Madness appeal, using each team’s account to promote the athletic giving challenge. It was generally a success. We’re trying to find more places to use Twitter.”

Still, not many education institutions are using Twitter. As Jenny Mandeville at Vanderbilt noted, “We have tried paid promotions on Twitter in the past, but without a massive ad budget it is difficult to get any traction on the platform.” This seems to be the consensus among social strategists at most education institutions.

### Promoting and Advertising on LinkedIn

LinkedIn also offers a variety of ways in which you can reach audiences on its platform. Unlike Facebook, LinkedIn is used by professionals for networking with other professionals, so you can target ads based on specific industries or job titles. You can create your own ads using the LinkedIn Ads platform, choosing either sponsored updates, which appear in a user’s news feed, or text ads, which appear in the user’s right-hand column. Both of them allow you to insert links so you can direct people to a LinkedIn page or to a website.

At present, colleges and universities are mostly using LinkedIn’s advertising and promotions for student recruitment, not for advancement purposes.



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