The **Bridgespan** Group

Tweeting For a Better World
Essentials of Social Media Strategy for Smaller Nonprofits

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Collaborating to accelerate social impact

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You've got to get out there—or so nonprofits are told. *There* being the world of social media: the ever-expanding array of web-based and mobile technologies that can turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Social media makes use of a range of highly accessible technologies—video, audio, digital text, or a mix of these. Content created on these platforms is shared in a social environment, whether that be Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or your organization's blog.

But in the rush to "go social," many nonprofits are failing to think through their strategy, define their target audience, match online tactics to real world goals, or consider how they might measure success and learn from failure. Too many organizations end up validating the observation of YouTube guru Chris Pirillo that "Twitter is a great place to tell the world what you're thinking before you've had a chance to think about it."

A key lesson from private-sector experience is worth taking to heart: Misiek Piskorski recently noted in the *Harvard Business Review* (November 2011) that companies that performed poorly in online social realms "merely imported their *digital strategies* into social environments by broadcasting commercial messages or seeking customer feedback."[1] Customers reject such overtures because they are involved with social media to connect with other people—not with organizations. Companies that found significant returns, on the other hand, devised *social strategies* that help people create or enhance relationships.

Ergo, the real opportunity for nonprofits in the social media world is deeper engagement with their audience, their *community*. What can such an engaged community do for you and with you? Recruit new allies, strengthen allegiance among existing ones, raise money, and spread the message—all of which, done right, can lower the cost of outreach. The payoff can be powerful.

Recognizing the need to build the social media capacity of nonprofits, the Rita Allen Foundation began a pilot project last spring, engaging the expertise and assistance of The Bridgespan Group, to help six grantees plan effective social media strategies. We and these six smaller-sized nonprofits (on average $1.8 million in annual revenue) worked together to determine if and how social

1 Mikołaj Jan Piskorski," Social Strategies That Work," *Harvard Business Review*, November 2011

media could advance each organization's mission, to develop implementation plans and measurement systems, and to collectively identify and address social media challenges.

1. Choose appropriate social media goals and connect them to organizational goals

The first step is to be clear about which of your core organizational goals you are trying to further through social media. Your social media goals should not only support organizational goals, such as fundraising or collaboration, but also play to social media's strength: encouraging authentic interaction through conversation with the audience.

However, many organizational goals do *not* lend themselves to this type of interaction. Getting major donors to step up to the next giving level or developing organizational partnerships, for example, are likely to require one-on-one or small-group conversations. And much of the information that an organization seeks to send out into the world is better communicated one-way (through a press release, a video, an annual report) than through the group conversations that are the hallmark of social media.

Consider the example of Educators 4 Excellence (E4E), an organization founded and run entirely by teachers, that seeks to provide an independent voice for educators in advocating for policies that support student achievement. E4E is explicitly working to "build a movement"—something to which social media ought to be well suited. As part of the journey, E4E chose two social media goals that support its overall organizational goal: (1) increasing membership, and (2) activating and engaging members.

One of E4E's signature activities is holding events at which educators can listen to speakers and talk with fellow educators about issues that affect them and their students. It seemed only natural, then, that social media could serve to extend and expand these peer-to-peer discussions about education reform into the online world. But it turned out that the candor that was possible in face-to-face groups was much harder to achieve online, where anyone could be listening in. E4E has refocused on using Facebook and Twitter to build attendance at its in-person meetings, and to keep people interested between meetings. It is also encouraging new members to sign its online petition, another ideal social media activity in line with its member engagement goal.

It's tempting to just dive in and start posting, but an honest assessment of your organization's goals—and how social media's unique strengths can help further them—is a vital first step for all that follows.

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2. Define and understand your community

The next step in setting social media strategy is to define your community for a specific engagement goal. Who are they? Your entire set of stakeholders (volunteers, donors, program participants, alumni, the targets of your advocacy work) or a subset of these? And what do you want this community to do in order to achieve your social media goal?

Defining a target community is the first step; the next is trying to understand what that community wants. What are its social media habits? What might it get out of your social media campaign? Social media attention span is typically short, and people won't "like" you on Facebook or will stop following you on Twitter if you are not interacting with them in a way that they find appealing and that supports their needs. A basic mistake is "talking" too much and not listening to and engaging with other voices in the community. Use surveys, interviews, or focus groups to find how this target community would like to interact with you. Ask them what social media tools they use, whether they'd like to interact with the organization through social media (and which forms), and what they'd like to hear from you (updates, policy information, event invitations?). And go online yourself. Hang out on Facebook pages and LinkedIn discussions, follow similar organizations and thought leaders on Twitter—and start listening!

Green City Force (GCF) is a New York City service corps that prepares young people from low-income backgrounds for sustainable careers, while reducing green-house gas emissions, and building the "green city." GCF sees the path to success for these young people as gaining work experience, technical skills, "eco-literacy," and academic progress during their six to eight months in the corps. After graduation, the corps alumni continue their progress to economic self-sufficiency through living-wage employment with benefits or work toward educational success as full-time students on track to complete higher education. This "theory of change" means that it is essential for the organization to stay connected to its alumni after their graduation from the corps.

In support of this critical organizational goal, GCF defined its social media audience as alumni and its long-term social media goal as outreach that effectively increases the number of alumni who get post-program support.

Next, GCF needed to understand what forms of communication appealed to its audience. The organization provides a useful example of what happens when you start asking your audience questions. GCF began the social media planning project thinking it needed a Facebook presence to stay connected to alumni corps members. In the course of interviewing and surveying

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alumni, GCF soon realized that it needed more than just a social media approach to keep them engaged after their period of service was over.

In order to deliver on its commitment to the urban youth it had graduated from its program, and to measure longer-term outcomes, it needed a new way of thinking about its relationship with alumni. GCF Operations Manager Lucian Cohen told us, "As a result of our survey work we have learned that contacting alumni consistently to evaluate our placement outcomes and create a sense of community can only be done . . . if we use a number of tactics. Alumni communication doesn't just happen after the program, it happens during the program, setting expectations for communication. It also involves asking a participant, 'How do you want to be contacted after the program?' 'How frequently?'" GCF will create individualized plans for alumni engagement, knowing that for many participants—though not for all—social media are the best tool.

3. Determine what to measure

Measurement in the online world can seem deceptively easy. How many people are following you on Twitter, or like you on Facebook? How many are commenting on your blog posts, viewing your videos on You Tube, re-tweeting you, or sharing an article with others? Hurray—these can all be counted!

Even better, once you know how you are doing, you can set measurable goals for improvement: increase the click-through rate to the website from Facebook and Twitter by 100 percent, increase online signups from the Facebook landing tab by 10 members a month, increase Facebook likes and Twitter followers by 50 percent over the next six months, and so on.

But because your social media goals connect to things in the "real world," it's important to try to get an idea of what these social media measures tell you about what you're actually seeking to achieve. You can do this in a variety of ways: periodically surveying people, asking event attendees what brought them there, and seeking to understand how much response can be attributed to each channel.

Let's look at the measurement plan developed by Global Kids, a nonprofit educational organization for global learning and youth development based in New York City. Global Kids identified two social media goals: (1) Mobilizing support for its youth social action projects, and (2) Supporting online fundraising. It set daily, weekly, and monthly/twice yearly measures. Both goals have a Facebook component; the online fundraising goal also has a Twitter component.

The following chart summarizes what Global Kids plans to do on Facebook and Twitter to achieve these two goals, and how it plans to measure both short- and longer-term progress:

Global Kids (GK) social media metrics

Goal	Target Audience	Tool	Short-term metrics	Longer-term metrics
Mobilize support for Youth Social Action Projects	Alumni, students, former staff, supporters of the mission	Facebook	• # of "likes" on FB page • # of "likes" for FB posts • Average # of people who see posts ("impressions") • Average # of comments on FB posts	• # of users "taking action" (e.g., attend event)
Mobilize support for online fundraising campaigns	"Global citizens": those with connection to the mission, but not necessarily to Global Kids	Facebook	• # of "likes" on FB page • # of "likes" for FB posts • Average # of people who see posts ("impressions") • Average # of comments on FB posts	• # of users acting as online campaign captains • Amount $ raised
		Twitter	• # of twitter followers • # of retweets	

Note that while Global Kids' shorter-term measures focus on online activities, over a longer time horizon, the organization is going to look at what happens back in the physical world: how many people attend events and how much money is raised. And it is seeking to mobilize a committed community of supporters to achieve these results—exactly the role that social media can perform best.

4. Allocate resources to get the job done

For most organizations, a custom-built set of social media tools will not be needed. Facebook and Twitter are great places to start, and unlike websites (which can be costly to develop) most social media tools are already built, just waiting for you to use them—and with a price-tag of zero.

Of course "free" does not necessarily come cheap. Ongoing costs are largely driven by staff time. It's important to be realistic about how much time it takes to update social media sites and create or find meaningful content; to monitor and respond to comments (including the kind of "edgy" or inappropriate comments that are bound to pop up); and to analyze what's working and test out new approaches. While you don't want to inundate people with too much content, they stop listening if you don't post frequently enough or don't say things that are important to them. The following is a chart of weekly time requirements for a small or medium-sized nonprofit that is pursuing a targeted social media strategy:

Ongoing social media costs are largely driven by staff time

Category	Activity	Approximate time required
Content	Creating content	2-6 per week
	Screening for relevant third-party content	1-5 hours per week
	Screening audience content	1-5 hours per week
Web	Posting to social media tools	2-6 hours per week
	Responding to comments/questions	1-4 hours per week
	Surfing relevant web and social media sites	2-5 hours per week
Measurement	Measuring results of social media tools	1-3 hours per week
	Evaluating progress towards goals	4 hours per month
	Conductin quarterly strategic review	3-6 hours per quarter

These time estimates are starting points for small organizations just getting involved in social media. For such organizations, having a meaningful presence on Facebook and Twitter can take a minimum of a quarter to half of one full-time staff member's time. Larger organizations that desire a more active social media presence could spend even more time on implementing their social media approach. How much staff time you will need to devote to your social media strategy depends on a variety of factors:

- How many channels you use (just Facebook? Facebook and Twitter? Other channels as well?);

- How frequently your audience requires you to post and how closely you want to manage your community (for example, responding to comments, both good and bad);

- How many voices you want on the channel (do you want lots of people tweeting from the field or just one person who manages the organization's external-facing accounts?).

Another potential cost is the creation of media. Organizations that are just looking to stay in touch with a small group of followers (as Green City Force is with its alumni) can leverage existing internal or external media to populate their feeds. Most organizations will probably use a mixture of "owned" media (like white papers you already have, your existing website, PowerPoint presentations you have already developed, etc.), and "earned" media (when your followers comment, re-tweet or forward your content, i.e., when they engage with you and get their friends engaged). However, those organizations that want to attract mass followership to achieve their goals (like Educators 4 Excellence, which wants to build a movement of

teachers, or Global Kids, which may seek to compete in online fundraising competitions) will need to invest in a more sophisticated website, Facebook application, or general social media presence. This investment might also include video editing services, skilled new hires, or freelance writers if articles and videos are a big part of your social media strategy.

The following chart outlines what these costs might look like:

Potential initial social media costs

Initial investment	Product/service	Approximate range of cost
Equipment	Computer equipment	$90-1,500/year
Social media tools	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	Free
	Ning	$20-600/year
Measurement tools	Facebook Insights, Google Analytics, Topsy (for Twitter), YouTube Insight, Klout, Social Mention	Free
	Scoutlabs	$250/month
	Radian6	$500/month
Initial content and strategy development	Social media strategist (10 hours/week, $100/hour)	~$13,000/3 months
Training	Workshops	~$300/workshop
	Webinars	Free-$75/webinar

Sources: Best Buy website; http//dannybrown.me/2010/01/17/the-real-cost-of-social-media/; http://thenextweb.com/socialmedia/2011/02/18/social-media-tools; http://new-york-social-media-workshop.eventbrite.com/

Finally, while it will depend on the particular type of strategy your organization pursues, social media usually involves a mix of roles—everything from an intern, fresh out of college, who can do some actual tweeting; to program staff, tweeting from conferences or from on the ground; to the executive director, whose help may be needed in crafting and communicating key messages, providing an official response in case a significant issue arises, or taking advantage of special opportunities. Junior staff members know the tools, but they may not know your organization's message or voice. And of course there is the question of authenticity; communications that are intended to represent the various aspects of an organization cannot all be generated by the most junior staff.

Consider a sample chart of staff roles developed during our collaborative planning project:

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Key processes and roles

Social media procedure	Responsibility to create, obtain, or approve					
	Executive Director	Managing Director	Director of Programs	Program Associate 1	Program Associate 2	College Captains
Provide official response in case of issue	Approve	Approve	Create			
Review social media strategy	Approve		Create			
Measure progress toward achieving targets	Approve		Create/ approve	Create		
Respond to non-problem posts daily				Create/ approve		
FB post: Current event/ news				Create		
FB post: Organizational news	Create	Create		Obtain		
FB post: Mentor spotlight				Create/ obtain	Obtain	Obtain
FB post: Relevant local events/opportunities				Create		
FB post: Class spotlight				Create/ obtain	Obtain	Obtain
FB post to College Captain group page: campus event/opportunity						Create
Blog post: Mentor success story			Approve	Create/ obtain	Create/ obtain	
Blog post: Thought leadership	Create/ obtain/ approve	Create/ obtain/ approve				
Blog post: Teacher/student post			Approve	Obtain	Obtain	
Blog post: Staff thoughts			Approve	Create/ obtain	Create/ obtain	
Twitter: Repost content from FB	Create			Create		

This may look complicated, but the great benefit of developing such a chart is that it forces you to think through the steps involved in creating and sustaining a social media strategy, and the resources that will actually be required.

5. Experiment, monitor, and modify

Social media work lends itself to experimentation and learning through doing. So it is important to use tools like link trackers and Facebook insights to understand which of your posts are generating the reaction you want (likes, reads, shares). Experiment with different elements, have more posts that end with something that allows interaction than those that do not (e.g., a question to answer, poll to take), and see what works and what doesn't

for your audience. Do your best to understand how people are reacting to these changes, not only online but in the real world.

In the social media planning project, we worked with each of the organizations to develop a learning agenda. Recall the example of Global Kids, which planned to use social media both to mobilize support for its youth social action projects and to enhance online fundraising. The organization posed three key questions, with a strategy and timeline for learning and acting on the answers.

Global Kids (GK) learning agenda

Learning agenda questions	Information required to answer	Approach and timeline	If the answer is "no," we will discuss:
We will be able to engage a population that doesn't have a personal connection to GK?	• What percentage of our current followers have a personal connection to GK? • What content will appeal to new followers who are unfamiliar with GK?	• Survey of our followers • Follow fans of similar orgs • Track what types of content are re-tweeted • Review strategy in January 2012	• New strategies to engage followers • Revising our Twitter strategy to target our extended GK Network
Will the benefits of an online fundraising strategy justify the costs and resource requirements?	• How much staff time is required to run an online campaign? • Which types of campaigns (e.g., voting contests vs. online auction) will appeal to our supporters?	• Track staff time requirements for fall online campaigns • Conduct cost-benefit analysis following conclusion of campaigns	• Limiting certain types of campaigns • Eliminating online campaigns altogether
Will we be able to use social media to add depth and purpose to our community?	• How will our young people be interested in engaging our online network in their campaigns? • Which issues will our supporters be most interested in rallying around?	• Work with staff and youth to map out outline calls to action • Increase content surrounding social action projects • Pilot strategy over 4 month period and review	• If unsuccessful in engaging fans, review the reasons why • If successful in engaging fans, review whether this brings youth closer to achieving GK's outcomes

Social media is powerful and it is global. Nonprofits are already using social media to listen to their communities and engage them to raise money, attract volunteers, strengthen their program offerings, and enhance their impact. *Some* are doing it well. The challenge, especially for the greater than 1 million smaller organizations with tight budgets and limited staff, is how to use scarce resources most effectively to reap the benefits.

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