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How to make the most of social media

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Social media should be seen by senior executives as a key component of every organisation's communications strategy. This highly effective way of engaging with your supporters will not only increase awareness to your organisation but used properly, could grow your donations and your audience.

Here's how to make the most of it.

1 Develop a social media strategy

Many charities make the mistake in thinking that sending out adhoc messages via social media will encourage donations and support. You may find it useful to have dedicated staff to develop a strategy and execute it.

2 Understand your audience

It is important to understand what your audience want, how they use social media, their demographics and what is important to them. This will allow you to establish an emotional connection with your supporters and fundraisers. Don't just focus on one social media network as you could miss out on a different audience. For example, Facebook is most popular with 25-34 year olds, while LinkedIn targets professionals, ideal if you're looking for corporate supporters.

3 Keep your posts fresh and entertaining

You want to catch as many people's attention as possible, the more interesting the content the more followers/supporters you are likely to get. Try to vary the message type, by using images for example, giving your followers/supporters something more visual to associate with your brand and campaign.

Don't get caught up in trying to create the next big viral campaign as this will detract from your message. Instead, focus on interesting content that will engage your audience; it will be a nice surprise if it does become the next big hit!

4 It's all about building relationships

Don't be afraid to open up the conversation - after all, you can learn some valuable insight into your audience. Try and create some debates and two-way conversations and engage with your audience more. Get to know your donors and build their trust.

Consistency is key

5 There is a lot of 'noise' out there, your challenge is to make your posts interesting and stand out. Many organisations make the mistake of not treating social media in the same way as other more traditional advertising methods. If you plan and schedule posts you will be at the forefront of your followers' minds.

Remember to vary the content and not just go in with the hard sell. Videos, infographics and interviews all make excellent and readable content. Using a social media management system like Hootsuite will help you execute campaigns across multiple social networks, allowing you to schedule your posts throughout the day and freeing up time to focus on content.

6 Reduce the number of steps it takes to donate

To make donating easier, don't just have one donate button; incorporate the request for donations throughout your content. The Facebook 'donate' button could be an important element in increasing donations.

7 Be careful of what you post

We've all seen the horror stories of social media gone wrong, from the disgruntled staff at HMV posting Twitter feeds live from the firing line to Justine Sacco a former New York City PR executive creating a social media firestorm by posting an inappropriate message before boarding a flight to South Africa. Don't let your organisation trend for the wrong reason. Having clear social media guidelines will help prevent this kind of negative activity and don't forget to proof read before you hit the send button!

Further information

This guide was written by Cerri Barton at NetPay.

NCVO helps voluntary organisations cut costs and become more effective by negotiating discounts and preferential arrangements on a wide range of products and services.

NCVO members are entitled to a number of discounts. More information on NCVO membership.

NetPay is a multi-channel, payment service provider that offers a range of payment processing services supported by a UK based team 24x7. NetPay and NCVO have joined forces to reduce the cost of taking card payments for NCVO members. NetPay is a leading payment services provider focused on delivering great value, backed up by exceptional customer service and support from the UK 24x7. NetPay's ethos is to help businesses reduce the costs of purchasing, whilst delivering unbeatable customer service.