

Nonprofit Social Media Primer

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Executive Summary

Having a social media strategy is not its own objective. Rather, social media strategies can support your existing objectives. Reflect on your organization's current objectives: Do you want to cultivate supporter relationships, build cause awareness, do online fundraising, or connect with new supporters? Those are all goals social media can help support, and this white paper examines a multitude of ways to get started and how your organization can benefit.

Your Social Media Strategy

You have a great framework: You can acquire donors, cultivate them, and fundraise. Moreover, you are using both online and offline channels to do it. But you have a nagging interest in social media. Newspapers and television shows are constantly referring to Twitter® and Facebook®, and the number of people participating in those channels is staggering. The first thing that strikes you is the potential for reaching large numbers of people. As you think about it more, the type of personalized, engaged, high-value relationships you could cultivate with people through social media becomes perhaps even more intriguing.

Once a nonprofit has gotten to this point in its thinking, the most common next questions are:

1. How can my organization use social media to pursue specific objectives?
2. What are the risks, and how should those risks be managed?
3. What are some examples of social media techniques that have provided real results?
4. How do we know what's being accomplished?

If you have questions like these, you are reading the right paper!

Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Your Social Media Strategy.....	1
When Did The Web Get Social?.....	2
Five Steps To Start Leveraging Social Media..	7
Where To Go From Here	9

Social media is compelling because of the number of people who participate.

Continued on following page

When Did The Web Get Social?

Given all the current talk about “social media,” you might assume that the Web’s core technology recently changed. But really (and of course), the Internet was conceived as a social medium. Email, the origination point for social computing, got started 38 years ago!ⁱ Discussion groups and file sharing got started 30 years ago as USENET. “Talk,” a real-time chat program like Yahoo! Messenger® and AOL Instant Messenger®, arrived on the scene 26 years ago. And the now venerable World Wide Web made its debut a full two decades in the past.

So with these beginnings, why was the first Wikipedia® entry for “social media” not created until 2005?

To see why this might be so, consider these two recent developments:

1. *The Internet’s ability to move and store large volumes of data has quintupled in the last decade.*ⁱⁱ
2. *A majority of people in the U.S. now have a high-speed connection to the Internet in their homes.*ⁱⁱⁱ

These two trends have created the technical and social environment needed for the original vision of the Internet as social medium to “go mainstream.” And that’s what’s different: The Internet no longer could be social; now it actively *is* social!

Your supporters and future supporters are out there, sharing photos, making connections, telling stories, giving advice, and watching videos:

- More than 1.2 billion email users^{iv}
- 200 million Facebook® users
- 13 billion photos on Facebook® & Flickr® alone^v
- More than 55 million visits per month on Twitter®^{vi}
- 133 million blogs^{vii}

Go ahead, join them...they’ll be glad to see you!

Pursuing Objectives Using Social Media

Having a social media strategy is not its own objective. Rather, social media strategies can support your existing objectives.

Reflect on your organization’s current objectives: Do you want to build cause awareness, connect with new supporters, cultivate supporter relationships, or build a private space on the web for your community? Those are all goals social media can help support.

Build Cause Awareness: Bookmark Your Content — Socially!

The National Wildlife Foundation was able to convert 243 “digs” into 43,703 page views for a webpage that would have only received 4,834 page views without the social bookmarking “assist”^{viii}.

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About the Author

Frank Barry manages professional services for Blackbaud Internet Solutions and is responsible for driving performance in the consulting, technical services, and project management practices. His team is focused on delivering quality work and repeatable solutions to ensure customers are successful using Blackbaud’s Internet products. Frank joined Blackbaud in 2004 as a project manager. In 2007, he began managing the enterprise implementation team. With more than eight years of experience in the nonprofit arena, he has worked with a diverse group of organizations including prominent churches and universities. Prior to working at Blackbaud, Frank worked in the San Diego, California region of an international church. His responsibilities included running web initiatives (website, CRM, email) and youth ministry activities. Frank received his bachelor’s degree in computer science from San Diego State University.

Do you have anything on your website that you'd like to “boost”?

Together, the popular social bookmarking sites Digg® and StumbleUpon® serve more than 25 million unique visitors each month. The reason people go to Digg® and StumbleUpon® is that they figure the community is a good judge of web content: If a lot of people have marked a web page as interesting or “diggged” it, they might like it too. When a web page starts to gain popularity on a social bookmarking service, it can drive a tremendous amount of traffic back to your site and help spread awareness of your cause to thousands of potential supporters.

Examples:

The National Wildlife Federation regularly submits content from the Federation's web properties to Digg® and StumbleUpon®. Visit <http://digg.com/search?s=nwf.org> to see their current content (more than 240 items as of early June 2009).

What It Takes:

Submitting content is easy; you just need to create an account (i.e., a user profile), after which adding web pages to the site only takes a few seconds. What takes longer is developing the profile itself by spending some time each day participating in the social bookmarking community. You need to submit great quality items, but moreover, you need to rank other submissions, leave comments, and add friends to your network.

The reason for this might not be clear until you notice two things:

- Social bookmarking sites are “smart”: They suggest content for you based on what people with similar profiles have liked. This matching engine will ultimately help your content reach many new people — but not until your profile has some usage data in it.
- There is some social reciprocity at work (it is a social bookmarking site after all). Some people will read an article you found interesting simply because you read an article they submitted.

Using social bookmarking, like many social media techniques, is “free” but does require an investment of time.

Measuring Results:

- Number of Page Views: Compare the amount of time you put into social bookmarking to the amount of money you would pay for an equivalent amount of online advertising.

Risk Management:

- Social bookmarking is a low-risk activity. Only submit the best content you have (as opposed to submitting everything), submit related high-quality content, and occasionally participate in the community by giving other submissions a “thumbs up.” Following those simple guidelines will keep your profile in good standing.

Technologies, and people's habits, have now evolved to the point where the Internet has realized the original social vision.

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Connect With New Supporters: Build a Facebook® Fan Page

Lance Armstrong Foundation was able to establish an additional way to communicate with more than 287,000 people by creating an organization page on Facebook®.

A Facebook® page is your organization's website on Facebook®. Its functionality is more limited, but it is much easier to manage, directly targets 200 million well-connected Internet users, and is structured in a way that directly helps you build your list of supporters. Additionally, your Facebook® page is a form of market research because it can provide you with demographic information about your supporters.

Examples:

Lance Armstrong Foundation has a successful Facebook® page at www.facebook.com/livestrong that currently engages more than 287,000 fans^x. Another good example is www.facebook.com/one, notable for its well-executed tie-in back to ONE's main website.

What It Takes:

Getting started is easy: You can have a basic Facebook® page in just a few minutes by filling out this web form: www.facebook.com/pages/create.php. Once your page is set up, you can control a whole host of powerful web features, including discussion groups, photo galleries, and event promotions.

- Choose the setting that allows your fans to post to your fan page wall.
- Engage your fans by cross-posting blog content, as well as sharing pictures and videos on a regular basis; all of these have the potential to start conversations.
- Regularly participate in the various conversations happening on your fan page

Measuring Results:

- **Number of New Supporters:** Count your fans as members of your house list. You can send these people messages through status updates on your organization page.
- **Engagement of New Supporters:** Treat your Facebook® page fans as a separate segment and compare its response rates to the response rates from other supporter groups in your list.
- **Supporter Demographics Report:** Use the "Insights" tool to get activity, as well as demographic, data about your fans. You can then take that data and figure out which content is making the greatest impact.

Risk Management:

- Facebook® fan pages will allow your organization to choose whether or not fans can update your site with comments, links, photos, and videos. With these features off, there is almost no risk, but there is also almost no social or viral element. With these features on, you have approximately the same issue you have with a blog: What if someone makes an objectionable comment that is now appearing on your web property? Facebook® lets page owners delete anything they don't like.

Social media strategies are potential means to your organization's existing goals.

Continued on following page

As with blogs, it's best to create a short, clear policy and then enforce it consistently. Generally, excluding only hateful and obscene content is preferred; otherwise, you might lose a chance to connect with someone who is starting off with a different point of view.

Social bookmarking sites can drive traffic to your web properties, amplifying their existing value.

Cultivate Relationships: Collaborate With Your Supporters

In 2008, the Brooklyn Museum ran a program that engaged 3,344 people with their organization in a substantive, creative, and satisfying way.

The Internet makes collaboration between large groups of widely spread people possible. And collaboration on substantive projects is great for building affinity in both directions — in your organization for its supporters, and in supporters for their organization.

Is there a way you could use the Internet to build affinity in your community through collaboration?

Example:

The Brooklyn Museum created an exhibit called Click! where the public got to be both the artist and the jury. Through an online system, members of the Museum's web community submitted photographs and then selected those that would be included in the show. A total of 3,344 people participated, and the show was a great success*.

What It Takes:

In the case described above, the core components were custom-built web forms that allowed for the submission and review of the photographs. Both traditional and social media messaging channels would be a good fit for promotion.

Measuring Results:

- **Comparative Engagement Measures:** In the short term, you can talk about the success of Click! type initiatives in terms of how many people participated. Of additional interest is carefully comparing subsequent levels of engagement for your "collaborating" supporters to those of your general supporter population. Do they make donations or purchase memberships at the same rate? Do they renew memberships at the same rate? Rate differences could speak to the lasting effects of developing relationships through collaboration.

Risk Management:

- Social media risk usually centers on user-generated content. Blogs, photo galleries, and video libraries that users contribute to are clear examples of where this kind of risk could occur. That said, user generated content is not a critical component of every social media strategy. In cases where it is (Click! for example), vetting before releasing the content for public consumption often eliminates the issue.

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Build a Space on the Web for Just Your Community: Make a Private Social Network

The United States Naval Academy Alumni Association and Foundation created an exclusive social network for their alumni, parents, and friends that is a perfect fit for their unique community.

When an organization wants to connect with its constituency in the context of a social network a Facebook® application, group or page is a great answer, right? After all, your people are likely already there. But...sometimes that isn't the whole story. In life and on the web, people engage in different social realms and the huge, very-public, melting-pot that Facebook® represents isn't always a perfect fit if you are aiming to create an environment that is saturated with your group's unique character and whose functionality is specialized to your domain. Luckily, you can solve this problem without developing your own Facebook® from scratch; there are a number of great tools available to help you on your way.

Example:

The United States Naval Academy Alumni Association and Foundation found itself in exactly the situation described above and employed the User Networking Manager within Blackbaud's NetCommunity system to quickly and effectively build USNA Connect, a specialized social network for Naval Academy alumni, parents and friends. Facebook® still has its place in their organization in the form of a fan page with photos, videos, and articles. But USNA Connect is a unique site that reflects the camaraderie of the Naval Academy and it features a host of functions that were specifically designed for its users:

- **“Suggested Friends”:** Tool suggests people you may know based on your friends and relationships in **The Raiser's Edge®**.
- **“Your Events”:** Shows all of the events you are attending and a list of others also attending that event.
- **“Friend Map”:** Displays a map overlaid with the locations of your friends in USNA Connect.
- **“Class News”:** News feed of articles and blog posts related to your class.
- **“Top Pages/News Articles”:** A listing of the most popular news articles and pages on their website.

What It Takes:

Tools like Blackbaud® NetCommunity™ greatly simplify the task of building a private social network. The backend database along with all the foundational pieces of functionality needed for a social network are already provided. These building blocks give your members the ability to create personal profiles, send messages, make friends, form sub-groups, and upload photos to their accounts. Users can also link their profiles to their Facebook® accounts to allow easy picture sharing. That said, building your unique social network will still require a significant investment of time from your organization. Conceptualization, design, configuration, and customization will all be important steps in your process. For most groups, a network build will be a small team's primary focus for at least a quarter of the year.

Social media risk
(and power!) centers on
user-generated content.

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Measuring Results:

- **Penetration Rate:** Often, a private social network's aim is to support and extend "connectedness" within a community of known size. Measure what percentage of your community is participating.
- **Activity Level:** The question you want to ask after 'What percentage of my community has joined?' is 'How active are those who have?' If people are logging on, reading and making posts, creating friend-connections and sharing photos, then you are well on your way to achieving your goals.

Risk Management:

- **Lackluster Adoption:** You don't want to consume your organization's resources building a network that doesn't get utilized. To mitigate this risk make sure your network reflects social patterns that already exist, or at least have tremendous potential to exist, in the offline world. Also, be realistic about the ongoing resource commitment your network will require: as "host" you need to introduce new content and ideas to facilitate continuous engagement and relevancy for your members.
- **Objectionable User Generated Content:** Private social networks can have an advantage with respect objectionable content because they are often populated by a group that already shares a similar set of values and sensibilities. Also, the members are far less anonymous to one another than they might be in more disjoint networks like MySpace®. The result is that these groups usually don't need much policing and will keep each other "in bounds" effectively. For your part, just be sure to provide links that allow people to flag or report suspect content so that it can be reviewed.

A Facebook® page for your organization can help you enlist new supporters and provide you with demographic information about them.

Five Steps To Start Leveraging Social Media

1. Pick an Existing Goal to Pursue.

Identify something your organization wants to accomplish. Many organizations find that social media provides good support for:

- building cause awareness
- connecting with new supporters
- soliciting online gifts
- cultivating supporter relationships

If you are just starting, pick one of these to focus on and let that objective guide you every step of the way.

2. Make Success Someone's Job.

Or at least make it an explicit part of someone's job! Treat social media like you would your other communication channels: Figure out where responsibility for your social media programs should reside in your organization and assign responsibility. Making an overt assignment (like you probably do with direct mail, email, telemarketing, public relations, and advertising) will let a person or group of people on your staff develop the focus, comprehensive view, and skills needed to leverage these new techniques effectively.

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3. Listen.

With your team identified and your initial goal in mind, you might be tempted to start doing something. Resist, at least until you have two more pieces in place. The first is your ability to listen in the social media channels. There are at least three reasons for this:

- Social media is a two-way channel; as politeness prescribes, you need to be ready to listen before you add to the conversation.
- Organizations like yours are already participating; seeing what they've done will give you inspiration, cautionary information, and a sense of what you need to do to differentiate your organization.
- Once you do start to contribute content, the disciplined framework for listening you've put in place will be used to measure the reach and impact of your initiatives.

Some starting points for regular monitoring include:

- Use the flexible automated alerts through Google® to receive periodic emails listing mentions of your organization across a variety of different types of web content: www.google.com/alerts.
- Search for your organization's name (or topic words) being used in the micro-blogging world with the search portal on Twitter®: www.search.twitter.com.
- Track the number of times a blog mentions your organization or related topics at www.technorati.com.

Track the number of mentions for your organization name, your staff, and events you are currently running in each of these mechanisms. This will help measure your organization's current social media footprint and prepare you to measure the reach of your future initiatives.

4. Establish a Baseline Social Media Presence.

After establishing your organization's ability to "listen" in the social media channel, the second step is to establish a baseline presence that you can use as a foundation for your subsequent social media campaigns. Remember the places you choose to engage should be places that make sense based on your objective.

- **Create an Organization Facebook® Page**

This will provide an outlet for any of the more than 200 million Facebook® users who would already like to connect with your organization on Facebook® in a simple way. The first version of your page can be very simple, and you can launch it in minutes. To get started, it doesn't need to do much more than greet your supporters and provide a link back to your website.

- **Create a Twitter® account**

This will give your organization a voice to speak with in the micro-blogging world. To get started, send out updates about newly available web resources, events, or programs your supporters will be interested in. Include links to the root content on your website.

There are straightforward ways to measure how your social media marketing initiatives are building cause awareness.

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5. Evolve.

Now you have an objective, dedicated staff, a way to listen and to measure results, as well as a foundational presence in the social media landscape. Reflect on what you've learned in your first few weeks of watchful monitoring, review the program examples talked about in the "Pursuing Objectives" section above, and formulate the plan for your first social media campaign. Your supporters are out there waiting to engage. Ready? Go!

Where To Go From Here

This paper provided a starting point for developing a sound approach for using social media to help your organization achieve its objectives. If you are looking for an experienced partner that understands the domain and can help you with related products and services, Blackbaud offers the following:

Blackbaud Social™: Blackbaud Social bridges the gap between public and privately branded social websites to make organizations more effective at constituent acquisition and retention. It seamlessly integrates with **Blackbaud Sphere®**, creating the most comprehensive online solution for social media, email marketing, online event management, website management, and advocacy.

Visit www.blackbaud.com/social to learn more.

Blackbaud Professional Services: We've been helping nonprofits build and run effective technology strategies for 25 years. Over that time, we've helped hospitals, churches, universities, service programs, advocacy groups, and nonprofits of every type craft and execute effective strategies that leverage social media. Visit www.blackbaud.com/services/designservices/bbi_overview.aspx to learn more.

Blackbaud® NetCommunity™: Blackbaud NetCommunity gives users the infrastructure they need to publish and maintain engaging websites, as well as run targeted, effective email campaigns. Moreover, its Wave functionality lets you offer a complete user network on your website and makes it easy for your users to share your story via social media channels where they already participate.

Visit www.blackbaud.com/bb/bbnc/wave.aspx to learn more.

Blackbaud Sphere®: With the industry's leading API-based open platform, **Sphere Events®** and **Sphere eMarketing®** are well suited for organizations that want to create "mashup" integrations with social media properties throughout the Web. Even without doing a thing, Sphere Events is deployed with built-in integrations to Twitter®, Facebook®, and YouTube® to ensure that your organization can optimize its reach and impact.

eTapestry®: Blackbaud's web-delivered fundraising solution is a great fit for smaller organizations looking to get started quickly, control costs, and avoid buying servers to run their software. It comes with powerful built-in APIs that you can use to link to the rest of the Web without incurring extra charges.

www.etapestry.com/node/726

Blackbaud is an experienced partner that offers both products and services that can help your organization reach its goals with social media-driven strategies or other methods.

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The Raiser's Edge®: The Raiser's Edge has been the nonprofit industry's standard-bearing fundraising system for more than 20 years. It comes with a powerful set of APIs and powerful native integrations to both Blackbaud® NetCommunity™ and Blackbaud Sphere®, making it a great choice for nonprofits looking for a total solution. You can start your investigation here:

www.blackbaud.com/products/fundraising/raisersedge.aspx.

ⁱ Raymond Samuel Tomlinson invents email: <http://openmap.bbn.com/~tomlinso/ra/firstemailframe.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/magazine/14search-t.html?pagewanted=all>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2009-06-03-internet-use-broadband_N.htm?csp=34?csp=23&RM_Exclude=aol

^{iv} <http://www.email-marketing-reports.com/metrics/email-statistics.htm>

^v <http://mashable.com/2008/10/15/facebook-10-billion-photos/> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr>

^{vi} <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter#2009>

^{vii} <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogsphere/>

^{viii} <http://www.slideshare.net/kanter/social-media-roi-case-study-slam-traffic>

^{ix} as of June 23, 2009

^x http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/click/quick_facts.php

About Blackbaud

Blackbaud is the leading global provider of software and services designed specifically for nonprofit organizations, enabling them to improve operational efficiency, build strong relationships, and raise more money to support their missions. Approximately 24,000 organizations — including The American Red Cross, Cancer Research UK, Earthjustice, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Lincoln Center, The Salvation Army, The Taft School, Tulsa Community Foundation, Ursinus College, the WGBH Educational Foundation, and Yale University — use one or more Blackbaud products and services for fundraising, constituent relationship management, financial management, website management, direct marketing, education administration, ticketing, business intelligence, prospect research, consulting, and analytics. Since 1981, Blackbaud's sole focus and expertise has been partnering with nonprofits and providing them the solutions they need to make a difference in their local communities and worldwide. Headquartered in the United States, Blackbaud also has operations in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit www.blackbaud.com.

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