

FACEBOOK FOR ASSOCIATIONS



YOUR TOP FIVE QUESTIONS ANSWERED, FROM HOW TO GET STARTED IN THIS POPULAR FORM OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO HOW TO MEASURE THE RETURN ON YOUR INVESTMENT.

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Facebook is the number one social media tool deployed by associations, according to a summer 2008 Association Social Technologies Survey. It's made up of more than 52 million people in the US alone. It's the online hangout of young professionals - as well as a growing number of young-at-heart professionals. Plus, setting up an official presence for your association is free.

1. You're always saying 'start by listening' - but what does that mean, exactly? And how do we know if our members are on Facebook?

'Listening' means finding where your members

are hanging out and paying attention to what they're discussing online. On Facebook, you can start by simply searching. To do that, just:

1. Set up a Facebook account.
2. Look for a search box at the top right the screen, where you can type in the name of your association (or related acronym and keywords) to see what comes up. Another easy way to start listening is by personally connecting to your members. Do you have members in your email address book? Facebook's Friend Finder walks you through the process of importing email addresses from your webmail (Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, Comcast, etc.) or

email client (Outlook 2000 or above). Then, Facebook will automatically find everyone in that list who is already on the network.

Checking this way is important because the last thing you want to do is spam your members. But if they are already on Facebook, they will usually be glad to get an invitation from you to connect.

2. What if we find an existing group on Facebook claiming to represent us even though we didn't have anything to do with it?

A group like this is another good thing. It is visible proof that you represent something of value that people want to share. In response:

- Join the group or page and connect with the administrator.
- Let him (or her) know that you're really happy he's bringing members together.

- Ask what you can do to help - from simply feeding content or logos to actually taking over the work of administering the group.
- Offer to link to the group from your website. Be as friendly as possible and you may reap the benefits in new members. You will certainly get some free word-of-mouth marketing.

3. Which should we set up... a Facebook Group, a Facebook Page, or both?

This issue is still being debated. For-profit businesses tend to prefer Facebook Pages. Pages are like a company profile. They let you track traffic and demographics and then target ads to group members and their friends.

I think, though, that as a membership association, you have an inherently special relationship with members that may enable you to get more out of a Facebook Group. Groups are intended to encourage interaction at a peer-to-peer level. In a Group, for example,

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you can send all your Group members messages that will reach them in their Facebook inbox. In contrast, on Pages you can only post 'updates' that people may or may not see.

4. OK, so now we have a group. How do we keep the activity going?

Nurturing your Facebook Group takes time

IF YOUR GOAL IS TO... THEN YOU SHOULD...

... find your stakeholders on Facebook	... track the number of group members or fans you get
... generate word of mouth	... track the number of pass-along event invitations
... track traffic back to your website	... use your site's landing page to generate that metric
... reach younger members	... track the demographics of your fans on your Page
... attract a new audience	... try Facebook Ads, which have powerful demographics and metrics you can use

and a little bit of regular effort, but it's not hard to do.

A crucial element is fresh content on a regular basis. Any time a group member posts content to your group, an update is posted in their friends' newsfeeds. So recruit a few champions - staff and members who have other members as Facebook friends. Ask them to upload photos of your events, tag people in the photos, post discussion topics, and otherwise participate in the group. If you don't get members involved as champions, the group can very easily wither and die. Remember, even if you want to use the group to market your stuff, peer-to-peer interaction is the key to a viable Facebook Group.

5. How do we measure success? What's the return on investment?

There are a lot of ways to measure your success on Facebook. The metrics you choose will depend on your goal for being in the space.

It will take time to start seeing a real ROI. Facebook is essentially a word-of-mouth engine; the more connections you can make with members, the more the engine can work for you. Once you establish yourself in the space and make connections with your stakeholders,

you will start to see benefits, especially if you are actively using event invitations and group messages with your Group or Page. The bottom line is this: A successful presence on Facebook can help you turn your membership base into a community of people who feel a connection with your organization. So go ahead - tap into the social graph. There is little risk in trying and a whole world to gain.



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