



SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NON-FOR PROFIT: MEETING THE MEMBERS OF TOMORROW

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS MODERNISED THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND HAS DEMOCRATISED KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION. OVER 2 BILLION PEOPLE ARE CONNECTED ON THE ONLINE WORLD AND INTERACT DAILY ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

**TEXT CLÁUDIA FORTES,
MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER,
SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERT, MCI BRUSSELS OFFICE**

SOCIAL MEDIA: FROM BUZZ TO ACTION, TO RESULTS

The buzz about social media has truly evolved and it is now more widely known as the umbrella that comprises online platforms for social and professional exchange of content, text, audio, images and video in real time. These platforms - like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace, and YouTube - have deeply changed businesses and social interaction.

In the case of professional associations, marketing mixes and community building have been reshaped. Membership acquisition and retention and event promotion is now also done through online platforms and new audiences, and results have been reached.

Cláudia Fortes

WHY INVEST TIME AND RESOURCES?

Currently 2/3 of the global Internet population (almost 2 billion) visit social networks and it is the 4th most popular online activity. If Facebook were a country it would be the 8th most populated one. The World Wide Web has brought together people and businesses. Social media has created the platforms for their interaction. These platforms are used to connect audiences that are vital for the development of products and services. Associations can also reach a wider audience of industry professionals and offer their products and services by using these worldwide populated platforms.

IT IS A DIALOGUE NOT A MONOLOGUE

It is time to take social media as a serious tool for association's marketing mix and community building. Social media is not just a marketing tool it also comprises:

- + **Public relations** - build the association's awareness and visibility to a larger audience. Include social media on the PR and crisis plan and consider having social media press releases.
- + **Customer service** - specific social media platforms can be used for membership recruitment and retention. Membership surveys and information on membership benefits can be made available via these platforms. The customer service strategy can also be adapted to include a plan for online product queries response.
- + **Loyalty building** - mix the traditional loyalty programmes with the use of on-line platforms for members, partners and event sponsors.
- + **Networking** - use social media as a platform where members and industry professionals can network. Claim the benefit of being the connector in your industry.

- + **Thought-leadership** - position the association as a thought leader in relevant industry topics. Stay ahead of the curve by regularly screening trends and ideas on social media and be the first to react to industry needs.

THE PLAN TO FOLLOW

Step 1: Investigate with members on how and when they want to be engaged. Select the necessary social media platforms where members already have or want to have a presence. Take immediate ownership of the association's name and space on the selected platforms. The platforms should be chosen according to the messages that need to be conveyed and the audience that needs to be targeted. For example, a blog is a channel for discussion forums and knowledge sharing, Twitter is an efficient channel for event updates and promotion, and LinkedIn for professional networking.

Associations can reach a wider audience of industry professionals and offer their products and services by using social media

Step 2: Define the association's social media strategy and plan. Incorporate it on the association's overall marketing strategy and business plan. Do go through the budget and resources needed and set specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the selected social media platforms.

Step 3: Plan actions and keep the association's brand consistent in all platforms. Ensure that the online dialogue is kept alive.

Step 4: Engage with the community and cater to their different interests and discussion topics. Members that are active and interested in social media can become 'virtual ambassadors' from and to the association's community. They can initiate discussions and invite their professional contacts to also



be a part. And they can have a pivotal role in successfully maintaining the dialogue and engagement.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

According to Roy Young, President of MarketingProfs Research, and his survey results on 'The state of social media marketing 2010: hype or real business impact?', the use of social media by the non-for profit organisations has been ranked as follows: 9% MySpace, 30% YouTube, 39% LinkedIn, 46% Twitter, and 51% Facebook.

The majority of associations in Europe have a presence on LinkedIn and Facebook. For industry related associations the preferred

social media platform is LinkedIn due to its professional nature.

Some associations in Europe have created a LinkedIn group that can only be joined by their members. The group is put forward as an additional membership benefit and members can have access to regular industry updates, networking opportunities, content sharing, and information and updates on events relevant to their profession.

For example, an association in professional services created a LinkedIn group open to any professional. The goal was to widen their audience and attract new members. A short overview about the association and its membership benefits was made available on the group, and membership information was sent to non-members that were part of the group.

Several professional associations are present in for example LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter with a consistent brand and message and a thought through target audience and KPIs. A well researched selection of social media platforms combined with a regular feed of valuable content to a targeted audience can result in fast growing numbers of members on the social media groups and association, and an improved attendance to their events.

Social media offers cross-fertilisation opportunities to associations since their products and services can grow and evolve via a multitude of channels and audiences. Associations can access new audiences and their future members through social media platforms. Social media offers the opportunity to anticipate industry trends and needs and to adapt products and services according to audiences' requests.

KEEP THE BALL ROLLING: VALUE RELATIONSHIPS, CREATE CONTENT AND NETWORK

- + **Be connected** and tell your community how and where to engage and participate. Use the newsletter, website, brochures, email signature, etc.
- + **Evaluate, adjust and optimise** your social media plan by reacting to the response and receptivity to the selected platforms. If your audience is not actively participating in one of the selected tools then look into phasing it out. And if the discussions on another platform mention trends and changes to products and services, proactively respond to them.
- + **Gain feedback** from your audience and use it for your products and services offers and messaging. Monitor the discussions and participation trends. Further expand the results from monitoring by launching a consequent debate or by surveying the audience.
- + **Measure** (metrics for your Return on Investment - ROI) audience, engagement, loyalty, influence, action, etc. Analyse and interpret your social media metrics in conjunction with your web analytics. Several ready made tools for social media measurement and monitoring are available on the market.

BUT BEFORE GETTING STARTED, KEEP IN MIND...

- + The online world is fast growing but real time and resources have to be invested. Some international associations have already integrated a full time social media specialist in their marketing team.
- + Social media is not another promotion vehicle for marketing. It is not the association's online strategy or plan. And it cannot make a product or service a suc-

cess, it can only assist in the promotion of the product/service of the association.

- + Be transparent in actions within social media. This can be perceived by members has a clear sign of trust on their valuable contributions.
- + Always maintain the brand and image on all selected social media platforms. The brand of the created groups has to be identical to the association overall brand. Also make available guidelines on how to use and participate on the selected groups and platforms. Be clear on the use of semantics in order to have consistent messaging in line with the association's positioning.

START TODAY!

Allocate the necessary time and resources to include social media in the marketing mix of your association. In case the association does not possess enough resources or hesitates on how to best proceed, do consider hiring or consulting a social media specialist.

You are one online connection away from revitalising your association and its products and services. Engage your community and join the billions of online users. These are your members of today and your members of tomorrow.

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