



SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NONPROFITS

Utilizing Social Media to Build Your Brand

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital media world, businesses and organizations are tasked with keeping up with, and appealing to, their audiences using methods and platforms they are familiar with. For nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in particular, their approach often needs to be somewhat different in order to effectively convey their messages and goals, and hopefully encourage their audiences engagement and donations. Social media is a tool NPOs can use to their benefit if approached the right way with clearly set goals, a strategy, and strong accompanying content.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA?

Nonprofits are largely dependent on the engagement of their audiences. Most of which are present on various forms of social media. In the interest of generating donations, organizing fundraising efforts and volunteer options, or meeting their various other goals, NPOs can utilize social media platforms to communicate and drive conversions.

Two-way Communication

One of the main elements that connects nonprofits and their audiences is social media. "Two-way communication" is an effective way nonprofits can engage their audiences with their organization. This includes creating content where the organization and the audience can effectively communicate to each other. However, simply having a presence on social media is not enough. Making sure established methods of online engagement are effective is important for NPOs to develop strong audiences that could potentially turn into donors. This requires creating posts that are engaging to desired audiences. For example, creating a short Facebook post that poses a question talking about a special topic can be used to collect responses from followers or spectators, otherwise known as a method of two-way communication. Understanding what content fits each platform is another key to creating a successful exchange of engagement. Effective use of social media

comes from understanding each platform, what works on different platforms and what doesn't, and creating a plan that will allow NPOs to execute creative content that invites feedback in some way. "Two-way communication" not only helps with audience engagement in the nonprofit world specifically, but it also allows NPO personnel to communicate and engage as well, adding a direct voice associated with the nonprofit.¹

Online Strategy

The way nonprofit organizations approach online strategy now is more along the lines of the ever changing industry of technology. Organizations are using social media to communicate to their audiences and to show how audiences are responding to the content they post online. Social media has become a part of daily life in American culture, and if social media is not implemented into the branding of NPOs it can hurt organizations significantly. Using social media will not only promote organizations in a more public way, it will also help motivate more people to get involved and help NPOs develop a presence in areas the organization wants to serve in. Staying up to date with what is currently going on in the world of social media will also be helpful for the nonprofit to be current and relevant.⁴

Bandwagon Effect

Apart from the exposure social media platforms garner, NPOs can also analyze their audience engagements to help optimize their efforts. An analysis of data will show that various audiences generate opinions and give their support based on the popular opinions of others, a method known as the bandwagon effect.³ Social media provides a sharing platform for users to engage and share their sentiments towards brands and encourage others to support a provided service. This can be largely beneficial for NPOs and cause an influx in their engagement. Although this method can also have negative effects if the sentiment toward the brand or its advertised service is negative itself.

Social Media Metrics

Likes, comments, and shares are social media metrics that can also reveal an NPOs audience sentiments as well as trigger the bandwagon effect. Likes are generally positive,

while reactions (like the love, care, haha, wow, sad, and angry emotions on Facebook) have to be assessed to identify a positive or negative sentiment. Either response gives insight into the audience's perception of the brand and reception to the content.³ Additionally, NPOs can modify their approaches to future content development and marketing strategies based on their analysis of this data.

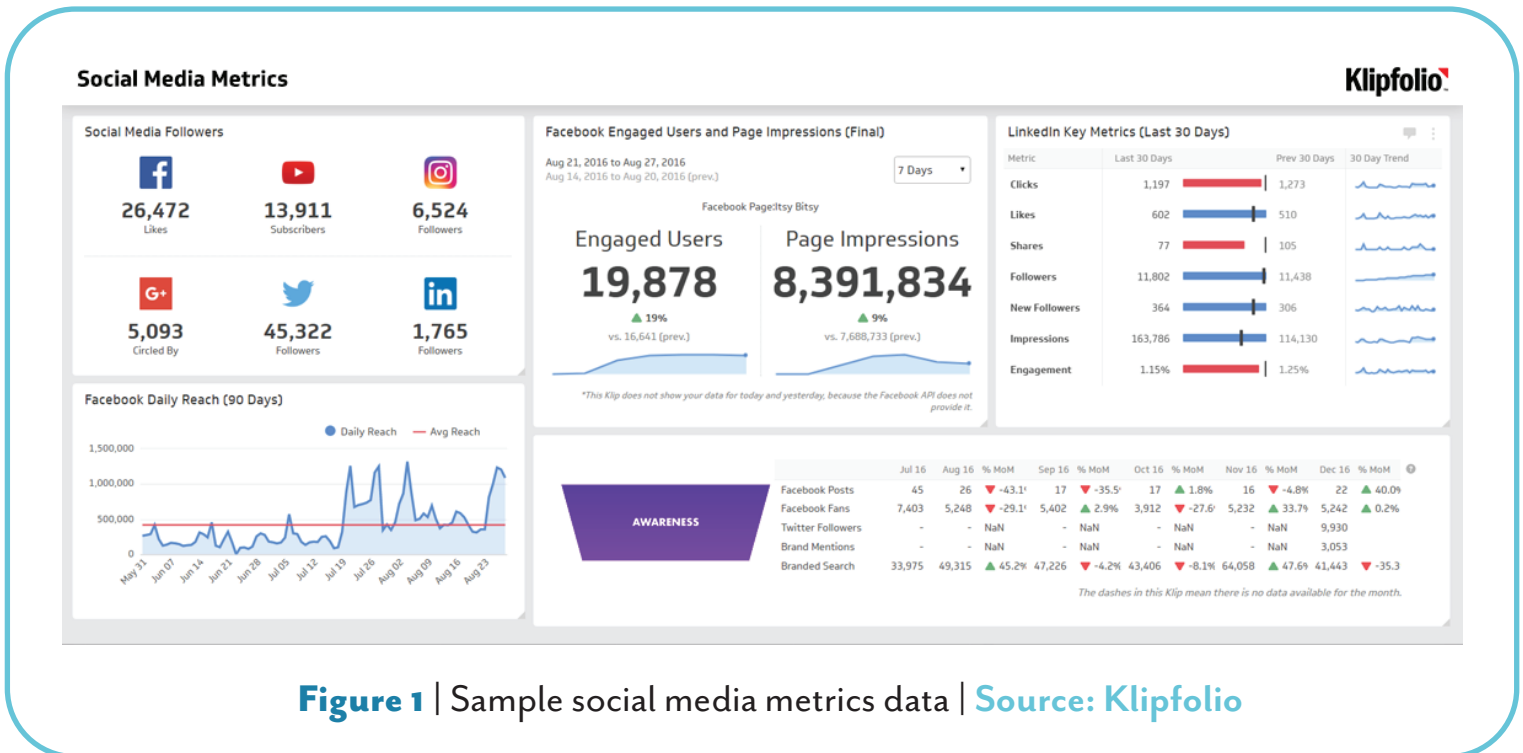


Figure 1 | Sample social media metrics data | [Source: Klipfolio](#)



FIRSTHAND ENCOUNTERS

Over time, establishing an online presence through social media has proven to be an asset in online marketing for nonprofits, especially within the past year due to the global pandemic. This has inspired nonprofits like the Georgia Innocence Project to go full throttle with their efforts online. Mike Cozsalter, Program Manager of the Georgia Innocence Project, emphasized the vitality of digital and social media in nonprofit work in campaign design and engaging potential supporters. Many facets of social media help nonprofits spread brand awareness virtually. "Sharing updates about our ongoing cases, raising awareness and informing our supporters about our mission and the injustices our clients face, notifying supporters of engagement opportunities like events and volunteering, hosting virtual events and webinars, and connecting with new groups and even potential clients are all tasks that take place on social media for our nonprofit." ¹⁰ Because social media is a space for free information of all kinds to live, social media is the perfect vehicle for nonprofit posts to reach multiple audiences. Within the past year alone, Georgia Innocence Project was able to share infographics on Instagram, broadcast a livestream of informative sessions on Youtube and Facebook, and share fundraising campaigns across multiple platforms.¹⁰ Social media campaigning allowed the Georgia Innocence Project to reach more people than they ever have.

Channels and Goals

Nonprofits often include both informational and personal content on their social media channels depending on their goals. If they are looking to educate the general public, an infographic may be posted. If they are sharing more personal content, a photo or blog post may be posted to provide more intimate connections between their content and their targeted audiences.¹⁰ Sometimes these digital deliverables may not be formal enough depending on what information audiences are seeking, so nonprofits must discern between the importance of posting and providing information in a formal way.

Partnerships

Not only does social media serve as the bridge between nonprofits and potential consumers or donors, it also provides more opportunities for partnerships. Platforms like Twitter enable nonprofits like the Georgia Innocence Project to show support and connect with other organizations. Facebook groups serve as a channel for conversation with supporters and donors as well. Even though public gatherings and events are currently not prohibited, social media has allowed virtual events to enable collaboration between nonprofits and people or organizations of influence. For example, the Georgia Innocence Project had the pleasure of partnering with the Atlanta Hawks in a livestream event on wrongful conviction day. This opportunity brought both exposure and awareness of their philanthropy to viewers online.¹⁰ Social media will only become more impactful as digital media continues to expand and grow.



MARKETING & ADVERTISING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

As the use of social media has become more significant in many business plans, brands and businesses who have an online presence know that social media is a free form of marketing and advertising to a certain extent. Social media should be the most feasible option for nonprofits to market and advertise online. “Social networking sites are cheaper and allow smaller organizations with low budgets to promote their services, attract new supporters, and target a new demographic group”.² Because nonprofit organizations are not receiving a large influx of funding like other bigger corporations, it is important for them to utilize social media in as many ways as possible. When executed properly, social media marketing and advertising campaigns can “cultivate a supportive following, expand your reach, and connect with high-value, loyal donors.”⁹



BUILDING A MARKETING STRATEGY

A marketing strategy helps nonprofit organizations to structure their goals into actionable processes. If implemented successfully, their efforts will be reflected in a boost of audience engagement and hopefully both social and monetary conversions (for example, email sign-ups and donations, respectively).

● Goal Setting

NPOs won't know how to measure their success if they have failed to identify what they want from their marketing strategy. Identifying their goals is the best way to evaluate the success of their campaign after it has been concluded. This means the company has to begin by stating **why** a marketing strategy is needed before identifying **who** the company's target audience is, **what** their constraints are, and **how** their success will be measured.⁷

● Choosing Audience

One of the best strategies NPOs can explore is using existing analytics data to identify their target audience for their marketing strategy. For new companies, assessing the audience sentiments towards other content posted by similar organizations can be helpful. For existing companies, looking at their previously successful campaigns, and the strategies which were used, is essential.⁷ While this is not an excuse to regurgitate previous content, it can help guide the new marketing process. Previous campaigns that were unsuccessful could also provide insight on what not to do.

● Donations & Fundraising

Because nonprofits rely heavily on donations and outside funding, developing a strategy to boost donations online is one of the many ways nonprofits can continue to stay afloat. Facebook seems to be the most successful platform in fundraising across multiple studies, followed by Youtube and blogging. The aim of using these platforms specifically enhancing their visibility. Donors are more likely to support a nonprofit if their online presence is consistent. In 2017, \$31 billion dollars were spent by shopping or donating online.⁸ However, channels like Facebook allow virtual event invitations to be sent to donors as well as spreading information to a wider audience.² Those features will in turn invite more donation opportunities that may not have been typically available to nonprofits to now take place virtually. It is crucial for nonprofits to analyze their goals in online fundraising to determine what platform will help them best reach those goals, as choosing the wrong platform could be detrimental to gathering a certain amount of donations.

● Telling A Story

Before the donation and fundraising process even begins, a story must be told for donors to become engaged with and aware of the work nonprofits are doing. If donors don't connect with or support the work being executed, they most likely will not be willing to donate. Making sure online content aligns with a strong mission statement and set of values will ensure donors and other stakeholders will know the intention behind the posts themselves.⁹ This clarity will provide them with more motivation to donate. Because 95%

of adults aged 18-34 are most likely to follow brands through social networking⁹, it is important to incorporate strong messaging through posting when seeking out donors.

NPOs should also seek out social media influencers who have an established audience and potential individuals who fall within the brands target.⁵ This method leverages the influencers popularity in order to communicate the story the NPO wants to promote. Having a popular face behind a compelling service can give a boost to engagement with the company's content and service. It is important to engage with an audience where they interact⁷ and that is often on social media, underneath the content of others of those who they esteem.

● Relevant Content

When formulating what content to post, organizations need to figure out what is the best fit for the specific goal and mission for that nonprofit specifically. This process will aid in analyzing what people who identify as an audience member are interested in viewing on their social media feed. Another effective way to strategize content is to ask the audience directly what they want to see, and how they want to engage on each social media platform. In addition to directly asking for audience feedback, creating a "content cycle" with different types of posts will help with filling for content that wasn't ready or content that might not have been effective. Creating those categories will help with organization and provide a vessel for consistent content to be posted.

When creating strategies regarding what type of content to post, nonprofits also must think about deliverables and how they can effectively interest their audience. Posts include but are not limited to: videos, graphics, photos and articles that are shared and written by specialists within the organization.

Creating and analyzing what types of content goes on each platform is crucial. Posts need to be created in a particular manner to strategically be showcased on each platform. Having a variety of content to choose from and post is important. It will keep audiences engaged and help with the return rate to nonprofit websites and social media pages. Content strategy is an important factor in creating posts. However, when to post is also a

major influence in keeping social media pages active and in overall engagement. Creating a content calendar will help with scheduling posts and will allow NPOs to see the bigger picture of what post will be posted and when. Following the accounts statistics and analytics will also help to see when a good time to post is. This will indicate when users are most active on social media and when people are engaging with different posts. Making sure content is posted during peak engagement hours will significantly impact a nonprofit's online reach because engagement is the main goal when using social media.⁶

BENCHMARKS

Success for an NGO is determined by the effectiveness of their marketing strategy. This success is normally reflected in conversion metrics that the NGO can:

Increase in Donations

Monetary increases from brand supporters.

Higher Engagement

Increase in likes, comments, and shares of content.

More Volunteers

Commitments to participate in brands' service components.

Boost in Followers

Increase in social media followers and email subscriptions.

Creating an effective social media strategy is essentially what will keep nonprofits current and thriving in the world of digital media. The use of social media by NGOs will produce more positive outcomes in regards to the progression of the organization. Principles like goal-setting, developing a marketing strategy, organizing content, and appealing to multiple audiences for the best possible donor outcome will all lead nonprofits in the right direction. Without social media as an option to tell their story and spread awareness of their work, nonprofits would not be able to rise to success.



RESOURCES

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