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How to use social media to

Increase Donor Loyalty

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EBOOK:

The Power of Social Media

By now, you know you should be tapping into social media as one of your foremost marketing strategies. Millions of Americans log into social media networks every day.

But there are a couple questions that have been vexing many brands:

"How do we effectively reach our audience on social media?" "What kind of content should we be distributing?"

The answers to those questions vary, with many expert marketers outlining this formula for tweets, posts and status updates:

- Posts about you or your brand
- Posts about your industry
- Conversations with followers

This "rule of thirds" formula may work in the for-profit sector, but it's woefully inadequate for nonprofit organizations.

I'll explain why you should be focusing on these three categories — Appreciation, Advocacy, and Appeals, the "3 A's."

Mastering the 3 A's

As you develop your social media campaign around the 3 A's, start by establishing a strong foundation. Let's do that by redefining social media.

Keep in mind, we're really talking about content.

Social media is the delivery system for that content, much in the same way that messages can be communicated in one-on-one conversations, direct mail or email.

If you're having a difficult time developing an effective social media campaign that earns clicks, followers and donations, in all likelihood, you're not experiencing a social media problem.

You have a content problem.

And here's the good news. Nonprofit organizations have an advantage over for-profit businesses; they can talk about all the great things they're doing to support their mission, their generous donors, milestones and victories. Unfortunately, many nonprofit organizations aren't getting results from their content — primarily because they're focusing on using social media to blast outbound marketing messages.

The 3 A's

Appreciation is really just saying, "Thank you" to all the people who support your organization and mission.

Advocacy involves telling stories of the successes your programs and services are having in the community.

Appeals is your request for help, whether for donations, volunteering or increasing awareness.

Art of Appreciation

Unlike in many areas of business social networking, you shouldn't divide your content equally among these three categories. As a nonprofit, you need to devote a significant portion of your social media campaign to donor appreciation. It's a strategy that works.

Appreciation is core to any donor retention and promotion efforts. Without appreciation, you'll have a difficult time using advocacy and appeals content to gain the traction you need to generate those clicks, likes, and comments. You should be including appreciation as a core part of your communications, including emails, notes and calls. However, appreciation on social media also offers an opportunity to gain more brand exposure and drive a deeper level of engagement. Better yet, you can make a significant impact on social media at a low cost.

4 Reasons Appreciation Works

1. Generates "feel good" publicity

By highlighting your donors in social media posts, you're publicizing their generosity and philanthropy. Most donors feel good about making a difference when supporting a cause; and will likely appreciate encouraging others to do the same by example. Here's another bonus: Donors likely will share your post about them and retweet information about your organization. Don't stop with donors. Publicize good works by employees, volunteers and vendors, as well. Take photos when possible.

2. Increases engagement

Posts of appreciation get the most engagement, more likes, comments, shares, retweets and favorites. All those metrics on social media. If you send out a generic appeal, people aren't going to like and comment on that. But if you send out a photo of someone that you helped or a volunteer group that came in, those posts get the most engagement, and it can really help the advocacy and the appeal content going forward. When you acknowledge corporate sponsors and grantees, it provides great PR for them.

Appreciation Examples

United Way One: Asks for donors' Twitter handle on donation forms, then follows up with simple messages like, "Thanks for your support of the United Way of Central Indiana!

Whitworth University: This institute of higher-education takes a creative approach using video. During their #DayOfPromise, they posted a short video of a student or staff member thanking donors and pledgers; calling the donor out by name and personalizing the on-camera message.

Texas Humane Heroes: This small animal shelter in Texas takes a photo of each individual or family and their newly adopted pet. The pet owners hold up a sign that proclaims, "I'm a hero, I adopted." This nonprofit devotes 100 percent of its Facebook postings to adopter recognition and, not surprisingly, they're getting great engagement — plenty of likes, comments and shares.

Wheeler Mission Ministries: This nonprofit, which serves homeless and underserved people in Indianapolis, posted a photo of a young girl who donated three large bags of stuffed animals in the hope they would bring a smile to the children who received them. That post got crazy engagement, with some people noting that gesture inspired them to give.

3. Increases interaction

There's a reason why Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are considered social networking platforms. They give you the opportunity to get one-on-one interactions and conversations started — which is impossible with traditional mailing or emails. Also, social media provides a way for donors to make their views known — one of the reasons cited in the Indiana University study on why donors stay.

4. Inspires others to give

By posting the good deeds of your donors on your social media networks, you're inspiring others to give. When Wheeler Mission posted a photo of one of its young donors on Facebook, other people were inspired. Questions popped up in the comments section about how to donate and where to drop off donations. By simply thanking a donor, the nonprofit was able to generate more donations.

Appreciation Tips:

1. Always ask for permission to post a photo or name
2. Avoid talking about how much was given
3. Place social media buttons on the donation confirmation page of your website to allow donors to easily share on social media. Use a statement like, "Hey, I just donated to ____. It's a great organization. Please support them."
4. Constantly look for opportunities.
5. Use photos and videos for more engagement.

Promote through Advocacy

By their very nature, all nonprofits have a mission and cause for which they are advocating. Social media is an excellent platform for telling followers about all the good work your organization is doing, while thanking supporters who contribute to those efforts.

Why Stories?

It's not an opinion that donors like stories. It's supported by decades of research.

In 2011, DonorVoice collaborated with around 250 nonprofits to find out what they had done well to keep about 1,200 donors loyal for many years.

A survey was sent to those loyal donors asking them to rank, by order of importance, 32 drivers of donor commitment. Here were the top seven:

1. Donor perceives your organization to be effective in trying to achieve its mission.
2. Donor knows what to expect from your organization with each interaction.
3. Donor receives a timely thank you.
4. Donor receives opportunities to make his or her views known.
5. Donor is given the feeling that he or she is part of an important cause.
6. Donor feels his or her involvement is appreciated.
7. Donor receives information showing who is being helped.

A study conducted in 2021 by the IU Lilly School of Philanthropy uncovered similar sentiments.

When asked what types of communication and content that subscription donors (a form of monthly recurring donors) would prefer to receive from nonprofit organizations they support, donors responded with the following:

52% - Stories and experiences shared by the people my gifts have helped

32% - Frequent updates about organization's programs and services

32% - Emails with my donation's impact and heartfelt thank you(s)

25% - Educational and interactive webinar series related to the organization's mission and impact areas

Impact stories lead the way in these donor loyalty studies. Your supporters want to know what their dollars are helping make possible!

Advocacy Examples

Innocence Project: This group, which helps exonerate the wrongly convicted through DNA testing and criminal justice reforms, posts touching moments in the lives of those who they have freed, like the first trip to a shopping mall to buy their first non-prison clothing in years.

Agapé Therapeutic Riding Resources: This therapeutic riding center shows off photos of their guests who are able to receive therapy through their services. These types of posts provide a visual on how the therapy works.

Outside the Box: This nonprofit, which provides job training, has a regular "Feel Good Friday" post to show photographs of guests enjoying their time at their facility. It's simple, yet another visual reminder of what it is doing to serve the community.

Make Appeals

OK, now you're regularly thanking your supporters and donors and you're sharing content that they will find valuable and informative. There will come a time when you want to ask for help. Social media is a great way to make an appeal. No one can deny social media has been a game-changer for online fundraising.

However, you must be strategic in your approach. It can mean the difference between success and failure. That's why appeals are listed third on the list. They should be used sparingly on social media because internet users generally resist solicitations and advertisements on social networks. Devote the bulk of your social media campaign to posts of appreciation and advocacy.

When you shift away from solicitation as a primary focus of social media usage, you can begin to build an authentic community around your brand. Here are several tips on how to make appeals effective on social media.

1. Be specific. The more detailed your appeal, the better. For example, a Tweet asking for donations of a specific item due to a shortage performs much better than a generic "Please consider donating today." Donors like to know where their money is going, so don't forget to share stories of donation impact.

2. Get help. Appeals by donors — influencers— on your behalf can increase your promotional reach exponentially. Ask high-visibility donors, board members, volunteers, and employees to get involved with the planning and deploying of your social media campaigns.

3. Express urgency. Not all appeals are urgent, but when they are, make sure you convey that in your posts and explain why the donation is needed. Again, be detailed about how it will help in a certain situation.

Appeal Examples

Agapé Therapeutic Riding Resources: Here is an example of this nonprofit's recent appeal which was accompanied by a photo: "Know anyone that would be interested in volunteering at our specific location?

We are currently searching for volunteers. Please reach out if you know someone who will be interested."

Wheeler Mission Ministries: The nonprofit recently posted this Tweet: "Our center for Women and Children desperately needs size 4 and 5 diapers. If you can help, click this link."

When developing an effective social media campaign for your nonprofit, keep in mind that it's all about balance. Avoid the temptation to self-promote. Champion your volunteers, donors and other people who are helping your nonprofit achieve its mission. Keep your network informed about the topics that matter to them. And sprinkle in those appeals and promotional material periodically.

By balancing those 3 A's in all the right ways, you can set your nonprofit organization up for social media success. It's what works.

Conclusion

With donor segmentation and personalized messages, you can make significant steps toward increasing your donor retention rates.

Through communications that are more tailored, your donors will understand that you appreciate them. They will understand how their dollars are being spent. They will feel a part of your organization and your mission.

The nonprofits that already do this are the ones thriving. They have high donor retention rates, high revenue rates and happy donors. And it's pretty simple to do. It's not always easy, but it is a simple plan to follow.

Click here to find out how Bloomerang can help you use social media to increase donor loyalty.