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Some Social Media Tips for Cause Marketers

How Companies and Their Nonprofit Partners Can Benefit From Digital Strategies

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Published: September 30, 2009

Today, digital strategies are essential for any effective cause marketing campaign. Scott Pansky of [Allison & Partners](#) shares some numbers, then offers tips on best practices for using digital media.



- **5 billion:** the number [in minutes](#) people around the world spend on Facebook each day
- **1.9 million:** the approximate number of [Tweets posted daily](#)
- **3.6 billion:** [photos on Flickr](#) as of June 2009

These remarkable numbers set the stage for the significance of digital and social media. More than that, they point up the importance of developing a strategy for tapping and utilizing these powerful networks.

Today, it is crucial that we incorporate digital strategies into our cause marketing campaigns. Not only do they provide direct reach, they also offer more value for the dollar to everyone involved. Integrated campaigns can play out on both corporate and nonprofit Web sites, on their Facebook pages and through e-mail databases. It's not so much about where you put the message on your Web site -- it's about where else you can push it to get a new, larger audience.

Combining your digital assets (social networks, e-mail contacts and Twitter accounts, for example) with those of your nonprofit partner creates multiple touch points that increase the reach of your campaign, as messages are shared with immediate contacts and then spread as they pass them to their contacts. In our work with Playskool and its Boundless Playground program, we distributed a tip sheet for how organizations could bring a playground to their communities. By distributing the tips digitally and pushing them through multiple databases, we were able to secure partnerships with more than 100 organizations to participate in a national essay contest.

We can help a cause campaign generate awareness and gain support by trying to make our messages go viral. [Charity Water](#) is a case study worth taking a look at for the how-tos of tapping social media to spread a campaign virally. Last September, the organization used Twitter and Facebook to encourage people with birthdays that month to solicit donations instead of traditional birthday gifts. The campaign raised approximately \$965,000.

One of our goals with every cause and social campaign we touch is to make them ART -- authentic, responsible and transparent. Your strategies should incorporate these three rules as well. By creating cohesive strategies for the digital world that include these characteristics, you can create awareness for your campaigns, drive participation for the cause and ignite the change that you need to see.

As a part of a campaign to support [philosophy's](#) with the [Joyful Heart Foundation](#), Allison & Partners devised a one-day virtual event that took place on both organizations' Facebook pages. The goal of the campaign was to drive new fans to the newly launched Joyful Heart Foundation page and raise general awareness for the organization. Leading up to the event, both pages shared common messaging to excite fans. On the day of the event, fans on both pages were [encouraged to share](#) a positive message about the foundation's mission and to change their profile picture for the day to a symbol of a lit candle to show their support.

The one-day event more than quadrupled visits to the two pages, helped the Joyful Heart Facebook page gain its first 500 fans and tripled Web traffic to the Joyful Heart Foundation's site. This is just one example of an effective strategy that took planning, sharing and coordination, but was low-cost and easy to execute.

A piece of advice I share with anyone who will listen is get visual. Digital media is so much more than words. It's about painting a picture through images and videos that help share your story. Platforms such as YouTube, Flickr and Picasa have made it easy. Share videos of individuals who benefit from donations; post photos from recent events; make slide shows that deliver a visual story. This provides every event, either public or private, a long-term second life with key audiences. If media didn't turn out for the event, you can still get "coverage," potentially reaching a larger audience.

The perfect example of a video taking off and reaching huge audiences is the [Jill and Kevin Heinz wedding video](#). You know the one -- where the whole wedding party danced down the aisle? In a matter of 10 days the video received more than 12 million views on YouTube. The story was covered by the Associated Press, MSNBC, People and USA Today. The newlyweds were even interviewed on "Today" -- all because they shared a creative, interesting visual.

The digital world is immediate, but it is also long-lasting, which is something worth taking advantage of. If you aren't repurposing your clips and advertising campaigns, you are missing out. Create an online newsroom; share your clips via Facebook and YouTube; post your ads online. This may seem basic, but it is an easy and effective way to increase awareness and longevity for a campaign. [This ad](#) for State Farm Insurance, featuring the song "I'll Be There" by the Jackson 5, was shared on YouTube and on the company's Web site (to name a few). It started as a tribute to the human spirit, and since has also found a news audience in the wake of Michael Jackson's passing.

My final tip is to practice the three E's: engage, evaluate and enhance. We are all new at this, and we are all learning. So engage with digital strategies; evaluate how your tactics are working; and enhance them the next time around. We should always be looking for how we can stretch and do more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Pansky is co-founder and partner of Allison & Partners, a strategic public relations and marketing agency. Mr. Pansky is a spokesman on cause-related marketing and teaches about this topic, public relations and sponsorship through UCLA's extension program.

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