



MissionBox Global Network (/community/1) > Operational Guidance (/group/5)

Why Social Media Matters to Nonprofits

Social media and social listening can improve your ability to engage with supporters and further your reach — and your mission.

By MissionBox staff |

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Improve your ability to engage with supporters and further your reach

Most nonprofits have a Facebook page or a Twitter account. But social media in the nonprofit world is about more than getting "likes." Find out how social media platforms and social media listening tools can help your organization succeed.

How can nonprofits use social media?

Social media – websites and apps that let users create, share and network – allows organizations with even the most limited budgets to reach a wide audience in a quick, cost-effective way. These platforms allow you to tell your organization's story.

Done well, social media messages can help you engage supporters, capturing and retaining their attention. Social media can also increase awareness of your organization or brand, which may support fundraising efforts. You might even use social media specifically for fundraising drives, such as the Giving Tuesday hashtag in the U.K.

To be effective, however, your social media efforts can't just be a side venture or a task randomly assigned to an intern. Your social media strategy should be integrated with your overall marketing strategy and aligned with your nonprofit's goals and target audiences. Specific staff members, interns or volunteers should be dedicated to keeping up with social media. Frequent posts and interactions can promote visibility and community engagement.

Also, social media isn't just about broadcasting information about your nonprofit. Social media presents nonprofits with opportunities to connect with supporters by responding to questions and comments or joining in new conversations. With a little creativity and humor, you can establish a dialogue that helps donors feel like more than cash machines.

What social media channels are most popular with nonprofits?

A recent survey of more than 9,000 small-to-medium-sized nonprofits in the United States and Canada showed that the majority of nonprofits list Facebook as their primary social network. Twitter is the next most commonly used platform. Other popular channels include YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Instagram.

While it might seem tempting to try to get your message out on as many platforms as possible, it's smarter to determine what platforms your target audience uses and go from there. Doing a great job of reaching out to current and potential supporters in a couple of platforms is smarter than doing a mediocre job on six or seven platforms.

How can a social media presence support relationship-building with key industry influencers?

Social media influencers are people positioned to best spread the word about your nonprofit and its campaigns. There are generally three types of influencers:

- **Citizens.** These influencers include volunteers, donors, activists, customers, fans and casual bloggers who aren't paid and have more than 500 social media connections.
- **Professionals.** Professional influencers are journalists, bloggers, partners or sector leaders who carry a certain level of influence and have access to a target community.
- **VIPs or celebrities.** These influencers are typically movement leaders, politicians, athletes, musicians, actors or authors with large followings.

Once you've identified key influencers, start following them on social media and get to know their content. Consider making strategic comments that build on their content and demonstrate your knowledge and expertise. The next step is to reach out, either via social media or email. Explain a little bit about your campaign, what kind of help you're looking for and why the influencer's help is important to your organization.

Why do social listening tools matter to nonprofits?

While social media can help you get your message out and engage with supporters, social media monitoring (social listening) can tell you what's being said about relevant topics. This can help you better engage with the people driving those conversations. More specifically, social listening tools can identify opportunities for positive interactions, as well as help you manage your reputation and any crises that might affect it.

What can social listening tools tell you about your audience?

Social listening can help you understand the needs of your target audience, including how they feel about your organization, what they want to hear, what they click on, whom they interact with and what they talk about on social media. You can use all of this information to improve your use of social media and your overall communications and marketing strategy.

What are the most effective ways to use social listening tools?

Even if your nonprofit is small, keeping on top of relevant conversations can be difficult, given the many different available platforms. That's why social listening tools come in handy. Consider these ways to use social listening tools:

- **Monitor mentions of your organization.** If you have any current campaigns, monitor mentions of those, too.
- **Monitor partners.** Are they talking about your campaigns?
- **Identify trends.** You can use social listening tools, such as a trending hashtag, to see what issues your audience is discussing. If a topic relevant to your work is becoming popular, you can use that information to properly time a donation appeal. You can also evaluate what your top influencers are talking about.
- **Identify opportunities for user generated content.** Social listening can help you find ways to use your top influencers to serve as ambassadors for your nonprofit and help deploy your message.

An investment in social media and social listening can play an important role in the success of your nonprofit. Consider how these platforms can improve your ability to engage with supporters and further your reach, as well as your mission.

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