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Community Organizing and Community Building for Health and Welfare

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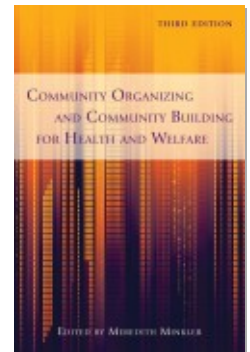
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Creating an Online Strategy to Enhance Effective Community Building and Organizing

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Online interactions are such a pervasive part of our society that 92 percent of two-year-olds in the United States have a digital footprint, such as photos posted on the web, and one out of eight married couples in 2009 met via social media (Magid 2010; Qualman 2011). As of 2011, the social networking site Facebook had over 500 million registered users (Facebook 2011). If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populous in the world after China and India (Grossman 2010).

Today's Internet landscape is infinitely dynamic. Aside from having access to an unlimited database of information, Internet users now continually edit, contribute, share, and discuss information. *Web 2.0*, the name given to this range of interactive and collaborative communication styles (O'Reilly 2005), "is not a new form of technology but rather a new way that everyday people" and tech developers use the Internet for participatory purposes (Daniels 2011, 278; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Much of this is made possible by social media. We define *social media* as a set of digital tools such as blogs, collaborative documents, photos, videos, and social networking sites that allow us to forge and nurture relationships with unprecedented ease and frequency (Kanter and Fine 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). These tools are inexpensive, easy to use, and represent a way of communicating that is here to stay. Social media is no teenage fad—in fact, the fastest-growing demographic on Facebook is women fifty-five and older (Lin 2010). Social media are effectively being used to engage thousands of people in a variety of issues to create social change.

Internet organizing was a key strategy in Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, allowing him to involve millions of people he had never met in campaigning for him with a single click of a button (Carr 2008) and raising an unprecedented amount of money via online donations. Experts argue that his campaign's strategic use of social media tapped into formerly politically inactive populations by engaging key stakeholders in each community, and was the single

biggest factor in winning him the race (Smith and Rainie 2008). The incoming Obama administration then used Web 2.0 and social media to engage thousands of Americans, in under a week's time, in reading about health care reform ideas and offering their own reactions and suggestions (Daniels 2011).

Recently, the whole world watched as social media played a critical role in ousting Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Facebook groups such as We Are All Khaled Said (named for a young man who was beaten to death by Egyptian security forces) grew from twenty thousand to four hundred thousand followers within weeks. Similarly, Twitter hashtags (the “#” symbol followed by a keyword Twitter users add to their posts to enter a conversation) such as #jan25—referring to the first day of the revolution—generated dozens of tweets (or Twitter posts) every minute just days after it was introduced. Such social media helped bring tens of thousands of protesters into the streets (Lister and Smith 2011). Organizers and protesters used cell phones to upload videos and photos to social media sites, giving their families and international allies real-time updates. When Internet access was shut down, they were able to record voicemails that were automatically transcribed into tweets (“Egypt Crisis” 2011). The successful role of social media in the Egyptian uprisings catalyzed similar organizing efforts by youth and their older allies in Jordan, Tunisia, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and other countries to gain civil rights and topple dictators through a domino effect during the “Arab Spring” of 2011 (Slackman 2011).

As this book goes to press, the similarly important role of Internet-supported organizing propelled the Occupy Wall Street movement, with supporters mobilizing around forthcoming demonstrations via Facebook and Twitter posts and providing real-time visual descriptions with photos and video streams taken on the ground by protesters or supporters.

With the demonstrated success of Internet organizing, the question facing community organizers today is not whether they *should* use social media for community building and advocacy, but *when* and *how* they should. Unfortunately, many groups have succumbed to the lure of easy-to-create Facebook pages and Twitter accounts without taking the time to think about “how to establish a consistent, sustainable, and easily recognizable presence that integrates and enhances both online and real-world activities” (Turner 2002, 55). Without an online strategy, these organizations are doing the digital equivalent of shouting at cars on the freeway—being ineffective. In this chapter we will discuss the potential for using the Internet for community organizing and will outline the steps for creating an online strategy. We will illustrate this through using both actual cases and a hypothetical example involving the use of the Internet to address hepatitis B and its high prevalence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. We will also provide tips and warnings about the most popular social media tools, emphasizing that social media is an outlet that should be used by organizers who are directed by time-tested community organizing principles. Finally, we will showcase a nonprofit—Collaborating Agencies Responding to Disasters (CARD)—that

has successfully incorporated an online strategy for education and community organizing.

Understanding Social Media

Why is social media so useful for community organizing? Beth Kanter and Allison Fine (2010) sum it up with the equation “social media powers social networks for social change” (9). Social media is a tool through which existing social networks communicate with each other in new and exciting ways. Consistent with the messages of Saul Alinsky (1971) and Paulo Freire (1973), who showed us that activism is most successful when organizers listen to and engage existing communities, social media offers new venues for such engagement. Gaining the support of key members of a community can in turn help move members of those individuals’ social networks into action, because individuals become involved in collective action through their personal connections (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Internet organizers are still targeting social networks through individuals; they’re just doing it through a different medium.

Community organizing principles such as listening to and assessing the community (see chapters 9 and 11), developing a long-term action strategy (Alinsky 1971), “starting where the people are” (Nyswander 1956), building community capacity and social capital (Chávez et al. 2010), and using social network mapping to assess and promote community identity (Amsden and Van Wynsberghe 2005) still apply in online organizing. What social media adds to community organizing, however, is an increased chance that people from different social networks will find your cause and join without being constrained by geography, time, or disability (Rheingold 2002). Online networks are larger, more diverse, and more “searchable.” Key individuals are much easier to find and engage with than before. Ideas and issues spread faster through online social networks. Curious people can participate as vigorously as they want. The offline tactics of traditional organizing are still the key components of your toolbox; social media is merely a way to enhance, reinforce, and amplify them.

A key point to remember is that although social media powers social networks, it is not the only way you should maintain connections to your partners, target audience, and supporters. Nothing can substitute for face-to-face interactions and relationship building; social media aids in finding the right people to connect with, then helps keep the relationships fresh. Social media itself is not your social network. Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign again provides a good case in point. Thousands of Obama’s online supporters had never been politically active. They joined his campaign’s online social network because of friends, traditional media messages, and talking to activists (Rainie et al. 2011). His campaign’s online organizing efforts simply enhanced, not replaced, their grassroots efforts on the ground where supporters pounded the pavement by standing on street corners, knocking on doors, and holding community events

and fund-raisers around the country. The Obama campaign's online efforts helped to raise funds and brought people from outside the campaign to connect with people on the ground.

As Kanter and Fine (2010) suggest, social media tools for community organizers can be grouped into three categories:

1. Conversation starters like blogs (short for *weblogs*), news feeds, YouTube, and Twitter
2. Collaboration tools such as Wiki and Google Apps
3. Social network builders like Facebook, LinkedIn, Ning, and Twitter

(For a visual listing of current social media tools organized by purpose, visit <http://theconversationprism.com>). All these tools can be used, to varying effect, to accomplish common organizing activities such as community assessment, community and coalition building, political activism, fund-raising, and sustainability. However, you must first create an online strategy that will dictate how, why, and which tools to use.

Creating an Online Strategy for Community Organizing

Developing an effective online presence can help further the mission of most organizing groups or agencies. For example, volunteers are critical to most organizing efforts, and Americans who use the Internet and social media are more likely to volunteer than those who do not (Rainie et al. 2011). Giving your organization a social media presence is simply part of "going to where the people are" (see chapter 3). Unfortunately, it is not an easy task. As Sonja Herbert (2005) notes, moving your group solely from a static website to engaging your target audience through more versatile Web 2.0 tools requires the "rules of grocery shopping: never go in without a list, resist buying what you already have, and avoid flashy products with little value" (332). Before launching any online initiative, it's important to know what you want to accomplish and then match the appropriate tools to achieve those goals by creating a strategy (Kanter and Fine 2010; Spitfire Strategies 2011; Ukura 2009).

The willingness to devote organizational resources toward Internet use in daily activities is the first step in overcoming what McNutt (2008) calls the "organizational digital divide." Often organizations or community groups hire a consultant, find a tech-savvy person to design their website, or find a young person to create their Facebook page, expecting dramatic results from a few hours of work. But successfully organizing through Internet engagement requires building a dedicated internal team, from the executive director to the line staff, that understands the strategy and purpose of doing this. A recent study by ZeroDivide found that nonprofits that successfully leveraged technology for social change

were most successful if the leadership integrated the Internet into its strategic plan, tailored messages via chosen web tools for specific audiences, and found ways to track and analyze all outgoing messages (Lee 2011).

We now walk through the steps to devising your strategy: identifying objectives, assessing your audience and environment, identifying your message, and evaluating your online activities.

Identifying Objectives

The first step is identifying what you want to accomplish with an Internet presence. Do you want to disseminate information about a specific topic or issues? Do you want to draw traffic to your website so followers access your new publications and resources? Promote an event or recruit volunteers for an event? Solicit donations? Encourage readers to take some action or advocacy step? Or lure journalists for media coverage? Most important, though, how does this support your long-term mission? Like successful community organizing, Internet organizing is not a stand-alone event; activities should build on each other to move toward a larger goal (see chapters 11 and 22).

To practice devising a strategy, let's assume you are a nonprofit whose overall goal is to reduce the incidence of hepatitis B among Asians and Pacific Islanders (API), who have much higher rates of infection and subsequent liver cancer than that of the general U.S. population (Chao et al. 2009). In the United States, API make up 4.5 percent of the population yet account for up to 70 percent of the country's 0.8–1.4 million people with hepatitis B (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009). Because of the asymptomatic nature of the disease, the Institute of Medicine (2010) estimates that more than half those infected are unaware of their infection status, creating problems for surveillance and disease management. In addition, the social and cultural stigma of the disease contributes to low rates of screening for infection and liver cancer (Chao et al. 2009; Tran 2009; Institute of Medicine 2010). To raise awareness of disease management and prevention of hepatitis B in API communities, the two biggest roadblocks to fighting the disease are identifying those with chronic infection and overcoming the social stigma against them (Institute of Medicine 2010). Your nonprofit's objectives for using the Internet to accomplish your goal of reducing the incidence of hepatitis B in API populations in the United States are the following:

1. Facilitate online conversations that identify social issues contributing to the high rates of infection
2. Provide clear, easily accessible information about testing, prevention, and treatment to those with hepatitis B and their close contacts
3. Identify and partner with relevant community-based organizations to reach out to their constituents with the information above

Note that raising awareness of the issue is not an objective but an overarching goal. You should eventually be able to rewrite the preceding objectives out using George Doran's (1981) SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) criteria, but you will need to gather some more contextual information first.

Assessing Your Audience and Your Environment

Once you choose your objectives, define your audience by identifying and defining the groups that will help you to reach these objectives. Your ultimate targets are the key decision makers, policymakers, and "influencers" who can help you achieve your larger goal. But there may be several intermediate layers of target audiences. For example, you may not have direct access to the policymakers you hope to influence, and who are your ultimate targets. But mobilizing your online supporters for a media-worthy event may well generate the attention you need to reach policymakers. The people who you hope to attract to your event are your immediate targets. All your targets should be identified in detail. For example:

- How old are they?
- What do they use the Internet for?
- What social media tools are they currently using, and how often do they use them?
- Who are the key decision makers you want to influence, and who do they listen to?

In order to answer many of these questions, you will need to assess your target audience by doing the online equivalent of listening to their conversations. As discussed in chapter 9, core principles of community assessment apply here: you must first listen to the general perceptions and beliefs of your target audience.

Listening to conversations online requires a fair amount of time. For starters, search for keywords on the Internet related to your topic of interest and divert them to a central reading place as they pop up, using feed readers—services that troll the web for keywords and topics you define and aggregate them in one place for you to read—such as Google Reader, Delicious, Digg, or Reddit. Use these services to answer questions such as the following:

- What is being said about your health or other topic?
- What are other groups doing to make change?
- What are the most up-to-date health or other relevant statistics?
- What seems to be working?
- What are your partners and opponents doing?

To assess your target audience, go to the sites they are using and read what they are reading. Your youth audience may be reading and posting to Facebook many times a day, whereas your political office-holder targets may be tweeting their vote on a measure. And if your targets are congregating in certain online locales,

what are they talking about in relation to your goals/issues/partners/competitors? If they are on Twitter, what messages are they reposting—or, in Twitter-speak, “retweeting”?

Primary research can be conducted via surveys, focus groups, or interviews by asking your current supporters how often they engage through social media tools and if they would be willing to engage with your social media tools around specific issues. For a sample template of an online survey that can be adapted and sent out through an online survey site such as Survey Monkey, see “A Sample Audience Survey,” in Idealware’s *The Nonprofit Social Media Decision Guide* (Idealware 2010a). This tool will help you to assess how often—or if ever—your targets use social media tools. The *Decision Guide* also gauges the likelihood that your targets will follow your causes via various social media tools. While you are likely to gather some useful information from primary research, direct observations will tell you the most about what your audience is actually doing. If your targets are congregating in certain online locales, what are they talking about in relation to your goals/issues/partners/competitors? What are your opponents saying about you, and what are they specifically saying that causes the most reaction or following?

Although listening takes time, its payoffs can be enormous. In January 2010, an unidentified individual or group started a viral web campaign asking women to post their bra color on their Facebook status for breast cancer awareness. Spokespersons for the Susan G. Komen Foundation were dumbfounded by this outpouring of support and, after announcing they had not started this campaign, asked supporters to visit their website and Facebook page. As a result, the numbers of “likes” on their page increased from 135 to 135,000 in less than a day, with an accompanying increase in donations (Schulte 2010). Constant listening and assessing allowed this group to take early action that resulted in tangible results.

When describing your target audience, be as specific as possible. To avoid a common mistake, remember that “the ‘general public’ is never a target audience” (Spitfire Strategies 2011). In other words, if you are talking to everyone, you have failed to target anyone.

In our hypothetical hepatitis B example, your nonprofit polls its current volunteers and finds that many of them are college-aged students who not only show up at many of your awareness events but bring their friends as well. Some of them have even started clubs at their campus to address the issue. They are more likely to use Facebook than Twitter to communicate with their friends. Many of them access the Internet, including visiting Facebook, Yelp, and other networking sites, through their phones.

You also learn that your staff members and colleagues at similar organizations use social media to connect with their friends and supporters. They are more likely to use Twitter than Facebook, have mobile Internet access, and use feed readers that follow the keywords *hepatitis*, *Asian*, and *liver cancer*. Your volunteers who are personally affected by this disease are likely to have family

members who use social media, ranging from teenagers to seniors, and use Facebook and photo sites like Flickr and Picasa to keep in touch with these family members.

You also search for Twitter hashtags like #hepatitis and #hbv and find that most searches reveal posts by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Division of Viral Hepatitis, by a nonprofit organization like yours, and by a few unaffiliated individuals who post very frequently and whom everyone else seems to be following.

Based on these preliminary results, your objectives can now be rewritten as the following:

1. To facilitate online conversations on Facebook with college-aged students that identify issues contributing to the high rates of infection, and give them tools to talk about these issues with their family members
2. To provide clear, easily accessible information about testing, prevention, and treatment to those with hepatitis B and their close contacts through your website and Twitter posts
3. To use Twitter to identify and partner with relevant community-based organizations to reach out to their constituents with the information above
4. To maintain ongoing contact with these organizations

These objectives are much more specific, but we still need to know exactly what to write on Facebook and Twitter.

Identifying Your Message

Before you implement your online strategy, you need strong, clear, direct messages targeted toward your audience. This should be part of your existing communications strategy (Dorfman 2010). Postal mail and meeting with influencers in person are still a critical part of your communications strategy that can be supported by, but not replace, your Internet activities (for more details on framing messages, see chapter 22, on media advocacy). Just as you will target different audiences for different goals, you will create tailored messages specific to your audiences. Messages directed toward volunteers may aim to inspire participation in a campaign, whereas messages directed toward policymakers may focus on demanding responsibility and accountability.

As before, crafting this message requires listening to your audience, knowing where they converse, and seeing what is most likely to elicit a positive response. What kinds of messages were most likely to be retweeted? What kinds of action steps were people most likely to take part in? What are people most interested in hearing about?

For example, in the process of "listening" to what people are saying about your topic, you read a comment on a blog post about a *New York Times* article on

the hepatitis B health disparity among Asian Americans. The writer comments, “This seems to be making a big deal out of a small issue. Everyone I know has already been vaccinated.” Another person asks, “What is it about Asians?” If someone has not already responded to these comments, it would be worthwhile to politely respond to clear up any misunderstanding about the issue. More important, what these comments show you is that you need to answer the questions of “why Asians and hepatitis B?” and “what’s wrong with the current system?” in most messages you craft.

Evaluating Your Impact and Your Strategy

Once you have created your online strategy, it is essential to pick the right metrics to match your strategy so you know if your methods are working. The good news is that most online activity can be measured. You just have to know how to set up your indicators and other measurement tools to enable you to gather the information that you need. You want to know who your audience is, who accesses your Facebook page and follows your tweets, and who takes action on your website. You want to know which individuals are engaged, and how they engage with your online content. The deeper the relationships that you have built with your audience, the more your efforts will pay off.

There are many resources to help you measure your impact. For instance, you can use Google Analytics to measure your reader growth, counting the number of subscribers versus visitors. It will also report to you whether those who accessed your page did so directly from a URL or if they were directed there from certain other sites and which pages they spent the most time on. You can use HootSuite to measure your reader engagement, that is, how much readers are interacting with you and your content and sharing the content with others on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and others. Most social media tools will have built in metrics. You can also use social media dashboards such as Socialbrite to update, monitor, manage, and maintain several communication outlets at once.

But there is a difference between measuring your social media activity and measuring the actual impact on your issue. Increasing your Facebook page likes may give you a larger member base through which you can increase the number of attendees at a given event. However, the number of people who sign petitions at your event doesn’t necessarily correlate well with the number of invitations your organization sent out to its supports via Facebook or Twitter.

To gauge the effectiveness of your social media activity in promoting offline action, consider polling your donors, event attendees, and volunteers about how they heard about your organization or cause. Did they hear about you through a friend? And if so, did this friend tell them in person or via a Facebook status update, a tweet, an e-mail, or a link on the friend’s blog? Easy-to-use online survey tools such as SurveyMonkey, Zoomerang, and Google Forms provide a free or low-cost method of tracking such information.

If you have answered most of the questions in the preceding sections and have a clear, specific picture of whom to talk to, why you are talking to them, and how to talk to them, then you have successfully outlined an online strategy. For a more detailed step-by-step walk-through, however, you may want to use a tool such as Smart Chart 3.0 (<http://smartchart.org>), an interactive worksheet for creating an online communications strategy. Another indispensable online resource is the Community Tool Box (<http://ctb.ku.edu>), which contains a multitude of case studies; worksheets; and forums on community organizing topics such as devising an action plan, conducting a community assessment, advocating for change, and sustaining the initiative (for more information, see Fawcett et al. 2003).

Engaging Your Audience Using Social Media

Just as community organizing theories inform your online strategy, engaging your audience through social media requires etiquette, or in this context, netiquette. Part of building your network involves recognizing and rewarding people for passing your message on to their networks. This can take the form of retweets, sharing their links on your sites if appropriate, or mentioning their event or cause in your blog. You can also send a personal thank you note with a link to your website. You may not need something from them in the immediate future, but your follow-ups are an investment in relationships that may someday be fruitful.

As in offline conversations, Tweets and Facebook posts are continuous streams. You must consistently insert your presence into the stream in the form of contributions or comments on other items in the stream. Such posts may also help you direct the conversation in a way you want it to go. In the previous example about misleading comments to a hepatitis B news article, your nonprofit would want to publicly reply that most Asians with hepatitis B are infected early in life and show no physical symptoms and so may already be infected by the time routine vaccinations take place (Chang et al. 2009). Then you might direct readers to your website or your Facebook page for more information or encourage them to attend your next educational event.

Remember that your online strategy should not be composed purely of social media tools. In our hepatitis B nonprofit example, after gaining the attention of our target audience through Facebook and Twitter communities, we want to direct its members to an online resource—namely, a website or electronic educational literature. Websites, e-mail lists, and searchable online databases are components of your online strategy that are just as important as your social media tools.

While there are many free and low-cost tools available on the Internet to help you get out your message or to help viewers to take an action, all tools are not created equal—they meet different needs and require different amounts of staff time and financial resources. Social media may be inexpensive, but its effective use requires time and dedication. In box 15.1, we summarize possible uses of several of the currently most popular Internet tools.

BOX 15.1.

Popular Internet Tools and Their Effective Use

Facebook

By far the most popular social networking site in the world, Facebook offers a large selection of features to keep your supporters engaged and potential supporters informed. Unlike many organizational websites, Facebook is not meant to be static. With Facebook, you can create an organizational profile; post updates, photos, videos, links, and polls; and collect donations. A poll of 460 social media–using nonprofits found that Facebook was most useful to them as a way to receive feedback on their activities, to start discussions, and to drive traffic to their website (Idealware 2010a). The more dynamic your Facebook page, group, or event page is, the more successful you will be in gaining and maintaining connections. On average, successful organizations spend two and a half hours a week on Facebook (Idealware 2010b).

In the hypothetical case of your hepatitis B nonprofit, creating a Facebook page would engage new audiences from among the college demographic by illustrating your activities with pictures and videos that can jump-start conversations. Linked events and calls to action, such as asking people to change their photo to an event poster, posting on an opponent's wall, signing a petition, or attending an event can make your page a good one-stop shop for participation while also driving offline participation. Offline gatherings are also an opportune time to ask your supporters to “like” your Facebook page so your updates will become part of their “feed,” or the stream of updates they see when they log into the social network.

A restriction with Facebook is that you don't have access to users' personal contact information. This is why it is important to direct your supporters from Facebook to your group's website to provide their background and contact information. Also, as people show up at an event advertised on Facebook, ask them to sign in and share their contact info.

Twitter

Twitter is an example of a microblogging site. The popular 140-character limit ensures that messages are to the point and can be read quickly. It's also a very popular tool for quickly posting links to news articles or other media. The speedy nature of the service means that Twitter posts, or tweets, are numerous and can drown out your message in the stream. Your organization can use social media managers like HootSuite or TweetDeck to preschedule tweets and keep track of who has retweeted you, mentioned you, private messaged you, and visited your Twitter page. You can also use lists and “hashtag” (the symbol # followed by your keyword) searches to listen in on what people are saying about your cause. Note that Facebook has a microblogging feature, also known as status updates, that can be linked to your Twitter account to update both simultaneously.

Although Twitter had over 105 million users as of April 2010, it is used by an older and more specific population than Facebook (Yarow, 2010). Surveys show that most Twitter users in the United States are twenty-five and older,

implying that many are working professionals (Idealware 2010b; Smith 2010). It follows that nonprofits found Twitter to be most useful for connecting with similar organizations, drawing media mentions, asking questions, and coordinating real-time events (Idealware 2010a). However, be careful about patting yourself on the back when you see an increase in your Twitter followers—the previous study also found that only a small percentage of those who read tweets actually take action or otherwise engage. Twitter is most useful as a listening and professional networking tool.

Blogs

A blog consists of static content updated fairly frequently by the organization, often by a single writer. Blogs include personal messages, personal expertise, and personal experiences. This combination of personality and information is what can differentiate it from a website. While blogs can be useful in generating thoughtful conversation, they are very time intensive. Many nonprofits polled by Idealware admitted that blogs were not vastly successful in engaging many supporters unless the blogger was a skilled writer and demonstrated a unique, specific expertise in a topic (Idealware 2010a).

Visual Media–Sharing Sites

These are often the most viewed and most successful types of conversation starters. A 2011 survey found that 28 percent of adult Internet users visited video-sharing sites such as YouTube daily (Pew 2011). Online visual media are also easy to measure, since these sites automatically track the number of views. They are useful as places to upload your organization’s media files, but can also be used to engage audiences through video votes, photo contests, and event invitations.

YouTube: This is the largest video-sharing site currently in use. Many nonprofits use YouTube to illustrate their work or educate their audience. It is important to test out various types of videos to see what your audience likes—short and sweet, informative and sentimental, and so on. Be sure to embed your videos on your other social media sites such as Facebook pages, your website, and Twitter. Those, and not video channels, are the main drivers of views. All of your community organization’s social media channels should be linked. Also be sure to include your organization’s website and social media information in the video description. If you think your video may be controversial, be sure to monitor and respond to the comments section quickly to prevent it from turning into a hate fest, or even disable comments altogether. While there are plenty of YouTube videos with blistering comment exchanges, you want to be able to control the conversation, which requires your frequent intervention.

SlideShare: This is a popular site for sharing PowerPoint presentations. Organizations can create profiles and upload all relevant presentations. This is a great way to share information between colleagues and potential partners.

Flickr: This is a popular photo-sharing site that allows commenting and easy integration with other social media sites. Its simplicity and ease of embedding has propelled Flickr to the top of photo-sharing sites. Be sure to tag your photos and albums appropriately, to increase “searchability.”

Online Advocacy and Activism

The countless communities and social networks we maintain via the Internet have been increasingly used for online advocacy and activism. Using Internet tools in this way can not only build community but also give its members a purpose that can result in efforts to promote policy change. Hick and McNutt (2002) propose a framework that categorizes online activism on a quadrant spectrum of conflict-based versus consensus-based approaches and technology-dependent versus technology-enhanced techniques. For example, an issue that requires a change in the power structure and supporters in an offline context will most likely use a conflict-based, technology-enhanced approach. Knowing your audience, key stakeholders, and technology capacity will dictate the type of approach you choose. Similarly, Vegh (2003) defines three types of Internet mobilization: calling for offline action (such as attending a rally), calling for an offline action that may be more effective online (such as e-mailing a policymaker), and calling for online action that is only possible online (such as Facebook messaging and e-mail campaigns).

You may use rallies, meetings, or other offline activities to incorporate people into your online activities, either by signing up for an e-mail list, “liking” your organization’s Facebook page, or following a Twitter feed. Similarly, your organization may use Facebook groups and e-mail action alerts for increasing attendance at events and asking supporters to write to their policymakers. These action alerts can also be used for flash campaigns such as the viral bra-color example. Finally, Twitter posts are useful for coordinating rallies and events in real time, since they are easily connected to smart phones and texts.

The ease of mass action via the Internet is seductive. Yet, as Packer (2003) notes in describing the success of MoveOn.org, one of the world’s most successful advocacy organizations, in-person street presence remains the most powerful culmination of Internet advocacy. Again, the Internet enhances advocacy but is not, in and of itself, the most effective agent of change.

Closing the Digital Divide

As we have emphasized, the Internet is simply a tool for organizing. The online strategy that guides your online activities should be informed by your bigger, and mostly offline, organizing plan that builds on the tenets of community organizing. Some of the underserved communities we hope to reach may not be using the Internet at all, or they may not have regular access to the Internet. As discussed in chapter 16, the “digital divide” or gap between those who have access to the Internet and those who do not, is created by factors such as technology access, generational gaps, literacy, geographic location, mental and physical disabilities, and traditional socioeconomic barriers that marginalize communities (Herbert 2005; Jansen 2010). Although 93 percent of teens and 80 percent of all adults in

the United States use the Internet, recent studies show that high income and being able bodied are the strongest predictors of Internet access and usage, and that there is a racial disparity in Internet access (Jansen 2010; Madden 2010; Fox 2011).

Fortunately, there are many efforts to bridge the digital divide. In 2005, the White House released a report recognizing the widening digital divide and outlined steps to tackle the problem. Subsequent pilot programs showed that we can successfully bridge this gap by providing computers and training to key households in underserved communities (Kreps 2005). Organizations such as the Digital Divide Network (www.digitaldivide.net), ZeroDivide (<http://zerodivide.org>), and the Community Technology Centers Network (www.ctcnet.org) provide an overview of the movements to bridge the divide, give searchable geographic locations of local technology resources and programs, and even test websites for disability access (www.techsoup.org).

We also should be mindful of the utility of cell phones as an alternative way to reach an audience. By 2010, over 300 million Americans had access to cell phones, and the number of people who own mobile phones and use them to access the Internet is increasing almost equally across racial and ethnic groups. This growth is especially large among youth and people of color (Rainie et al. 2011). Programs like Speak to Tweet, a service developed by Google for Egypt that automatically translates recorded voicemails into Tweets, further help close the divide (“Egypt Crisis” 2011).

But whether through a computer or a cell phone, Internet access is not enough to drive action and engagement. Over a decade ago, Norris (2001) pointed to the existence of a “democratic divide” among those already online, between those who were willing and knew how to use the Internet for civil (or health) engagement, and those who did not, and this gap remains substantial. This is loosely translated to what many Internet users term the “1 percent rule”—that for every 100 people online, 89 read content, 10 comment on it, and just 1 person actually created the content (Arthur 2006). A big part of our effectiveness in online organizing will involve overcoming not only the traditional digital divide, but also the 1 percent rule, and moving more Internet users from passively reading material or hosting static websites to working on- and offline to help bring about change. We end with a brief case study of a disaster preparedness organization that illustrates this point.

Collaborating Agencies Responding to Disasters: A Case Study

Collaborating Agencies Responding to Disasters, or CARD (<http://www.cardcanhelp.org>), is a good example of an organization that has successfully transitioned into using social media to further its mission. CARD was created by local nonprofit agencies after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in California—before the Internet became popular—to fill a long-existing gap and provide emergency preparedness

and disaster response resources designed specifically for nonprofits. For a decade, their grassroots community organizing efforts around disaster issues were handled through landline phones, paper newsletters, and in-person meetings. Then in 2000, CARD's new executive director, Ana-Marie Jones, recognized the value of embracing new technologies and online opportunities. She started by outfitting the office with a new computer network as well as shifting outreach strategies from paper mailers and fax blasts to e-mails, a website, and eventually social media.

It wasn't easy to make this shift inside an organization whose primary constituents often didn't have current technology. Early on, Jones encouraged staff members to use the Internet and social media tools in their personal lives, so that they could learn the value of these tools for building personal networks. She helped convince their collaborating partners that social media was essential to nonprofits by citing trends, gathering success stories, and illustrating how much easier it was to post agency information on Facebook or Twitter than on a traditional static website or in paper newsletters. She also shared stories of people who had donated to a cause because a friend had made a request on Facebook.

With buy-in from staff and partners, CARD mapped out an online strategy. To connect with its target market, it searched for nonprofits on various social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Since many of CARD's nonprofit agencies and emergency management partners didn't use Twitter, the group copied and pasted its Tweets and sent them out through e-mail. CARD also displayed incoming Tweets at conferences so that participants could experience Twitter in real time and see what people were saying about its presentations. Making social media accessible for people who were not yet users lured many participants into trying it out. Years of working with nonprofits on a hard-to-sell topic like disaster preparedness taught CARD what its audience needed: empowerment through trainings that specifically addressed nonprofit needs and concerns, as well as socialized, simplified, and institutionalized activities that were critical to both everyday preparedness and disaster resilience.

Through "listening" on Twitter, CARD learned how (and how not) to spread its message. For example, a federal agency posted multiple items where the only difference in the subject line was the last word (*hurricane, fire, floods, terrorism*, etc.) When CARD retweeted, it looked to some people as though they had received the same message multiple times. CARD learned not to retweet certain messages without first making changes.

Despite CARD's having a strategy, it was difficult to avoid common mistakes. At first, the group kept each social media tool separate, which was more time consuming. Then it autolinked many of its social media tools, which required using greater care when choosing messages. Eventually, however, it developed a specific use for each tool and embraced HootSuite as its management system. CARD uses LinkedIn to connect with its colleagues and partners in the nonprofit

sector, emergency management, and philanthropy. Status updates keep the group's stakeholders informed about CARD's activities and its commitment to fear-free emergency preparedness. It uses Facebook for everyday updates, posting classes and opportunities, thanking and highlighting the efforts of the agencies CARD serves, and sharing information important to its partners. It uses Twitter for fast information retrieval, keeping current on emerging trends, and sharing resources and links to its website and other social media tools.

Aside from using social media tools to keep longtime clients engaged and to reach out to new clients, CARD also used social media to stay abreast of funder activities. Promoting its funders' events to its followers maintained a good and informative working relationship with its sources of financial support. CARD, in short, provides a clear example of how an organization can use the Internet and social media to greatly increase its effectiveness in reaching its target audiences and strengthen its partnerships—in this case, with potentially lifesaving results.

Conclusion

This chapter introduces a framework through which grassroots and nonprofit organizations can benefit from “harnessing the power of the Internet” (Herbert 2005, 331) by engaging the public and work partners. But while using the Internet can be essential to furthering your cause, remember to stick to your community organizing principles. Your online efforts are not effective without your offline efforts, where in-person communications and engagement with your target audience are essential to moving toward your mission and meeting your objectives. The key to Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was not only getting thousands of people to donate small sums of money via the web but also turning millions of voters out to the polls on Election Day.

Just as your community organizing activities may change, so will the online tools that are available. New social media tools are introduced every day, and remaining static in your online strategy and implementation will only result in static support and results. Just as you need to remain agile in responding to opponents and the changing political landscape, it is essential to be flexible in consistently evaluating and adapting your online strategy to best meet the needs of your supporters and your mission.

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