



Corande Publishing, LLC

A Web 2.0 Strategy For Nonprofit Organizations

Using Web 2.0 Tools to Build Your Organization

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, digital technology has irrevocably woven itself into the fabric of society. The Internet has become increasingly accessible, portable and relevant in people's lives; surpassing traditional media on most fronts and capturing increasing numbers of traditional media's audience. One of the obvious results has been the financial failure of a number of large newspapers with the survivors holding on and struggling to find a niche to anchor themselves to. The same fate awaits traditional broadcast and cable television in the next decade as Internet TV continues to grow. As the population continues to convert to e-mail and rely on commercial shippers to deliver goods, the U.S. Post Office finds itself oversized, overstaffed, and constantly in need of subsidy by American Taxpayers.

Traditional media appears to some degree to be struggling to grasp what is happening and those organizations which have for years relied on traditional media to deliver their message are now realizing that as traditional media's audience shrinks, their effectiveness as a communications outlet shrinks as well.

In short, the digital age is here, it is continually growing and evolving, and it is essentially unstoppable short of a world-wide technological collapse. It embodies a paradigm shift which is leaving leaders in nonprofit organizations in the unfamiliar position of having to find and/or develop totally new approaches to accomplish their goals. For many leaders this situation is absolutely horrifying. Nothing in their careers has prepared them for this sort of rapid change. After all, traditional media and traditional methods have been effective and brought them success for their professional lifetime. Now many leaders find themselves facing the unimaginable position of no longer having the answers. They face sitting across from younger people and having to not only listen to them, but to learn from them as well. For many their world has truly turned upside down.

The unfortunate truth is that many of these leaders, rather than address the problem, will elect to cast blame on others or on conditions beyond their control. Others will simply make excuses for their problems. In either case they will refuse to learn new skills and will continue to cling to the media and methods that worked for them in the past. The purveyors of traditional media and methods will encourage them to do so because they desperately need customers. These resistant leaders simply will not accept change and change will overwhelm their organizations just as it is already overwhelming many traditional media outlets.

I was once taught that every problem bears the seeds of its own solution. It has been my experience that this axiom is frequently true and it is true in this situation. It is the goal of this continuing article to help nonprofits discover those solutions and develop a practical strategy and some specific tactics to help them effectively make the digital shift in their organizations.

HOW URGENTLY DO YOU NEED A WEB 2.0 STRATEGY?

Over the past few days, participants in various online discussions I'm engaged in have expressed the opinion that while there may be some value in nonprofits engaging in social media / Web 2.0 tools, the need to shift emphasis to a web approach is not all that urgent.

I found it quite timely that through a [Linkedin](#) group I'm involved with, an article appeared, courtesy of [ThirdSector](#), regarding a soon to be released survey from [Charities Aid Foundation](#). The survey "[How to Connect With Donors: Essential Messages for Charities](#)" is due to be released in full in February. The survey involved 203 people surveyed between March and June 2009 and the initial findings are revealing.

The lead-in for the pre-release article states, *"People want charities to communicate more through email and social networking sites".* The article elaborates on this, stating, *"Sixty-nine per cent of respondents said they thought charities should make more use of social networking sites, but only 12 per cent said they wanted them to do more telephone fundraising and 13 per cent said they should send more direct mail"...*

For me the message is clear. While many nonprofits have been debating the web's potential and asking whether it and social media can be an important part of their organization's outreach, society has embraced the web wholeheartedly. It is likely that if the same survey were conducted today, (6 months later) the number of respondents indicating a preference for web-based communication would be even higher.

On a secondary level, the traditional fundraising approaches of telephone and direct mail solicitation did not have a favorable response. I don't find this surprising for two reasons.

- 1) There is a growing segment of the population who no longer sees the need for a home telephone. These individuals opt for a cell phone only lifestyle and don't want their mobile phone number on anyone's solicitation list. In fact there are already U.S. Laws in place limiting unsolicited calls on mobile phones.
- 2) The movement to preserve natural resources is growing around the world. Unsolicited direct mail is often seen as a waste of these resources while electrons are perceived as comparatively waste free. In the face of the green movement, "snail mail" isn't green.

So how urgently does your organization need to embrace web 2.0? Here's my answer.

If your organization doesn't intelligently implement some version of Web 2.0 strategy in 2010, you will likely assume a subordinate position in the realm of public opinion to those organizations that do. You may catch a break if no significant peer organizations implement a successful strategy of their own but at some point someone is going to step out of the pack if for no other reason than dwindling financial resources force them into it for cost savings. Those organizations that move forward promptly and reach out through the use of web tools will be rewarded with higher levels of recognition and correspondingly higher levels of support. If you fall behind you may be able to recover with prompt and decisive action, but valuable time and opportunity will have been lost. Time wasted can translate into income unrealized from donations and, if you had [monetized your e-newsletter](#), unrealized earnings as well.

If your organization does not embrace Web 2.0 by the end of 2011, your organization will likely be in real trouble or fast approaching it. You will be competing for support with peer organizations some of which have a two-year head start establishing themselves as the legitimate and current voice for their cause [in the Developed World](#). As such they will attract the lion's share of both support and recognition, leaving you in a difficult and subordinate position. Two years doesn't sound like long, but we are speaking in terms of Internet Years. To give you some grasp of how quickly social media has taken hold and changed the rules of the game I recommend this [video](#), featured as a courtesy on our website.

It sounds harsh and I'm sure proponents of "traditional methods" like telephone and direct mail solicitors will argue that their methods still work. For the time being they do work and even if they didn't do you really think they would tell you? The question however is not whether they will work or how long they will work; methods and tools have always evolved and will continue to do so. **The real question is whether your organization will be able to survive the societal and technological changes going on around you and what do you need to do to insure your survival.**

THE FIRST LAW: Its About Control

Internet based media is rapidly supplanting broadcast, cable, postal mail and printed media because it gives the consumer extraordinary control over what they see. Cable TV supplanted broadcast television by offering more channels, giving viewers more personal control over what they were seeing, Internet based media is supplanting cable because it facilitates infinitely greater viewer control. The Internet also adds a degree of viewer interactivity that traditional media could never approach. Comparing traditional media's "Letter to the Editor" to today's "click and respond" interactivity is like comparing smoke signals to cell phones. The overriding equation for consumers is: CHOICES = CONTROL. The Internet and digital communications provide the level of control that consumers want and that is precisely why traditional media is being eclipsed by digital media in the Internet age. From a business perspective: CHOICES = SUCCESS, but only if you're offering choices.

This situation does not necessarily have to be a bad one for your organization unless you allow it to be. Web 2.0 is, in the final analysis, only a new set of tools, and new tools can yield higher productivity if you make the effort to learn how to use them. So remember: Web 2.0 is not your problem; how you're looking at Web 2.0 is your problem. For you, Web 2.0 is your solution.

When you think about it CHOICES = CONTROL applies to organizations as well as the audience. Before the digital age your communications options were limited. With Web 2.0 and its tools at your disposal you have more control over your message. It works FOR you, not against you. CONTROL = OPTIONS. Just as control works for the viewing audience, it can work for you.

Just as Internet based media provides the audience more control over what they view and hear, by delivering information they want to view and hear through internet based media you gain an audience. You control the message, you control the frequency, and you control interaction and response to a degree unattainable in traditional media. The new media gives you the ability to locate and communicate directly with groups that share your concerns and interests and subsequently engage them in your cause. Using the new media properly can waste less effort, attract more support, and actively engage more people in your cause.

Next we are going to begin discussion of various Web 2.0 tools which may be combined to create a strategy for communicating with the outside world to promote your organization and services. Your Web 2.0 strategy, if properly executed, should result in a growing base of support, an increase in fundraising, and improved member/supporter involvement.

THE SECOND LAW: Good Strategy Is Multifaceted and Flexible

Your Web 2.0 Strategy should include the following list of digital media tools:

- 1) [A Website](#) – Your website is the digital intersection where all your Web 2.0 media meets. Through it you will connect to and serve your audience. Through your web host you will access email service with your website's name.
- 2) [An e-Newsletter](#). An e-newsletter is one of the first tools you should opt for and you should have an automatic Can-Spam compliant opt-in subscriber list. Properly used this feature will constantly gather subscriber emails for you without effort on your part. An important tip: You should have a link to the subscription system on your homepage as well as other key pages in your website. Your website homepage is the first and in some cases the only page a site visitor will see. It may be your only chance to turn a visitor into a subscriber and you don't want to miss it.
- 3) [A Blog](#). A blog (weblog) can be an important tool for your organization. Blog posts may be generated by one person or a team of people. But most importantly it must provide useful and interesting information and be updated regularly.
- 4) A [Facebook](#) Presence. Facebook can be an important free tool for reaching out to your target audience. Through it you can join and reach out to groups with a natural affinity to your cause, promote special events, and build your own following using the groups and pages features.
- 5) A [Linkedin](#) Presence. Similar to Facebook yet on a more professional level, LinkedIn can provide the means to connect with professionals in your industry. Through it you can network with professionals in your industry and engage in industry related discussions with peers around the world.
- 6) A [Twitter](#) Presence. Twitter offers instant communication in 140 character bursts with individuals and groups of people who have a shared interest in a subject or cause.
- 7) [Online video](#). YouTube or a similar online video service can provide you with the ability to inexpensively add video to websites, or within social sites. Video can be used to deliver a message, entertain, or arouse interest in your cause.

These will serve as the primary tools of your Web 2.0 strategy in this series of articles and we'll discuss how each in-turn may be used to support your organization.

THE THIRD LAW: Content Is King

Most nonprofit organizations have a website. For those who don't there are enough economical web hosting services providing attractive templates free or at a nominal charge to allow even the smallest organization to maintain an attractive website. All in all, having a website is easy. Providing that website with relevant content that attracts visitors, invites involvement in your cause, and encourages support of your organization's programs is the key.

While an attractive and well organized website is preferred, I've seen some very productive UGLY websites because the content was great and it was easy to navigate to information that interested readers. By all means make your website attractive but remember, CONTENT- NOT DESIGN, appears in search engines and delivers visitors.

Think about the last book you read cover to cover, and why you continued picking it up until you finished it... I'd wager that it wasn't because the cover was beautiful or the font was impressive. It was because CONTENT, the story, the plot, the subject matter, drew you irresistibly. Remember this example when you must choose where to focus your efforts, and invest it in content. If you do, you will achieve an interesting website, e-newsletter and blog which will attract readers to your cause. If not, your results will be limited at best.

Here are some additional Website tips.

- A. Be absolutely honest. This should go without saying, but zeal for a cause can occasionally tempt someone to exaggerate facts to make a point. Any fact, figure, stories, or news that is featured on your website should be absolutely true. Once your credibility is gone, your cause is crippled.
- B. Remember who your audience is. Make sure the information featured is interesting to your readers. You and your staff are not your audience. Look at your site with the eyes of a first-time visitor and make sure to include content for them as well as regular visitors. Ask the question: Does our homepage convey our message clearly, simply and effectively? If it does visitors may stick around and ultimately form a relationship, if it does not, they probably won't.
- C. Change is essential. If your website looks today exactly like it did six months ago, it is time to make some changes. They don't have to be sweeping changes (unless your website is really poor); you just need to make subtle changes like changing photos or graphics, changing some colors, adding links, or updating content. Change arouses interest and increases activity. Why do you think they regularly shift items around in grocery stores? Make some subtle design changes to your website occasionally throughout the year to achieve this effect.

- D. Your website is the online equivalent of "Grand Central Station". Your website, particularly the home page, should link to the other tools you employ in your Web 2.0 strategy. Do not add a link to a tool such as an e-newsletter, Facebook or a blog unless that tool is active. Visitors hate nonworking links. Your homepage should also be designed to include links to important and relevant information throughout your website about your cause and programs.
- E. Obey the "three click rule". Optimally no important information on your website should require more than 3 easy clicks to navigate to from your homepage. Review your site regularly and do your best to insure this rule is followed. Viewers who have difficulty finding information won't hang around. I have visited nonprofit websites looking for an e-newsletter and couldn't find it without opening the site map. This has no doubt cost them subscribers when a simple "subscribe to our e-newsletter" button on their homepage would resolve this.
- F. Make your organization easy to contact. It is amazing how many nonprofit websites there are who won't make available staff or department email addresses to readers. They don't even have a "catchall" email account that a real person responds to. They employ a restrictive web contact form with an autoresponder indicating that you should get a response within 5 days. (Probably a form letter) If your staff is too important to communicate with the outside world, don't be surprised when the world turns its back on you.
- G. Remember your message. The novelty of flash graphics, etc. that were a trend on the web a few years ago has completely worn off. Today's web users want information and they want it NOW. Intense graphics can slow down page loading and test your audience's patience, causing them to abbreviate their visit. Your cause should be your message and that's what you want visitors to see and focus on. If what most impresses visitors to your website is the site itself, your cause has become secondary (unless your cause is "web beautification").
- H. Don't make fund raising the focus of your website. It is fine to solicit financial support through donations and corporate partnerships on your website. In fact, it would be rather foolish to ignore these features. BUT, don't make it the overriding theme of your website. Solicitations for support should be low key and simple to use. Be sure that every donation results in a personal e-thank you note from an officer of your organization.

While CONTENT IS KING applies to all web-based communications, for websites NAVIGATION is an important factor as well. Design and maintain your website with great content and ease of navigation and you have the first building block in place for your Web 2.0 Strategy.

THE FOURTH LAW – An E-Newsletter Isn't Just A Newsletter.

Newsletters have a long tradition in organizations of all types. Traditionally they have been composed, printed, and distributed primarily to disseminate information to organization members with the goal of building community within an organization, promoting planned activities and functions, and maintaining member interest. It has traditionally been an internal document, designed almost exclusively for member use. Traditionally newsletters have been printed and mailed to a recipient through the postal service, an expensive and time consuming practice that diverts important staff and financial resources away from your programs. For those concerned with the ecology, traditional printed newsletters and direct mailings also carry a substantial carbon footprint consuming significant natural resources, creating manufacturing waste, and consuming fuels.

As part of a web 2.0 strategy, an e-newsletter should accomplish the traditional purposes of a newsletter, PLUS provide the following five additional benefits, without the ecological impact.

1. An e-newsletter will save your organization money.

The Internet is widely available in developed countries around the world. Employing an e-newsletter only makes sense and eliminates almost the entire cost involved in newsletter distribution. You can email thousands of e-newsletters free in lieu of paying for envelopes and stamps to mail a printed newsletter. Organizations who are communicating with supporters in developed nations would be wise to convert to e-newsletters as quickly as possible, offering printed newsletters only to those supporters who don't have Internet access. Taking this action allows an organization to divert a considerable amount of the funds formerly devoted to print and postage expenses back into programs.

2. An e-newsletter is a "Green" alternative to print and postage newsletters.

Every e-newsletter that you don't print and mail represents fewer trees harvested and processed into paper, transportation to the printer, printing, transportation to a postal facility and transportation to an address. Eliminating these processes has the potential to save trees and fuel as well as eliminate manufacturing pollutants and waste. It also represents less paper in landfills. If your organization is truly sensitive to the environment, it should be communicating digitally as much as possible and highlighting the fact where appropriate.

3. An e-newsletter should reach out to the digital world at large.

Traditionally organizations published newsletters for internal communications and used direct mailings and press releases for external communications. Your e-newsletter should serve as your organization's private news service to the world beyond your members and supporters. If your Staff needs an e-newsletter, create a separate one. Your e-newsletter should serve both

your internal and external readers. By providing content that arouses the interest of all readers and avoiding content that is solely "insider" in nature, your e-newsletter can attract readers who are interested in your cause and turn them into supporters. A traditional newsletter which reached only the household to whom it was addressed is far surpassed by an e-newsletter that can crisscross the Internet as recipients, with your encouragement, forward it to friends and family interested in your cause. Include a free subscription link in each edition and treat it as a virtual newspaper with a broad audience. It can become one as you promote it through the web 2.0 tools we'll discuss later.

4. An e-newsletter should benefit your organization financially. Obviously you can solicit financial support through an e-newsletter by providing a link to your website's donation area. But with a little help [your e-newsletter could easily provide a significant ongoing source of income for your organization](#). If your organization accepts, or is willing to accept, financial or in-kind support from businesses, there is no reason your e-newsletter cannot be an ongoing financial resource for your organization. Corande Publishing provides free e-newsletter and fundraising services for qualifying nonprofit organizations. (Legitimate family-friendly organizations with reasonable subscriber base potential). You simply provide them with your content and promote subscription to your e-newsletter and Corande Publishing will develop a template, compose, and publish your monthly HTML e-newsletter to your subscribers at no cost to your organization. In addition they will solicit advertising sponsorship from family-friendly corporations for your newsletter, sharing a significant portion of the proceeds with your organization. It is easy, requires no special software and details are available free at <http://www.corande.com>.
5. An e-newsletter should create opportunities for corporate partnerships. If you use the free service provided by Corande Publishing, once you have a sufficient subscribership, you will find your organization and its cause exposed to family-friendly businesses who embrace the idea of associating their company with your cause. This will provide you with an opportunity to develop even closer relationships, gaining exposure to a larger network of contacts. Through this free service, your e-newsletter can be a doorway to win-win corporate partnerships and a new model for corporate support of your cause, AT NO OUT OF POCKET EXPENSE to your organization

BLOGGING – Weaving A Network

Every nonprofit organization that intends to utilize web 2.0 to build their organization should have a blog. For the benefit of any reader who doesn't know what a blog is, here's an official definition. *A Blog: "A web log. A shared on-line journal where people can post diary entries..."*

This official definition of "diary entries" may be a little misleading. For your blog to be an effective tool for your organization it might be more appropriate to use the terms "journal entries" or "essays". In any case, your topics should revolve around your organization's causes and programs, as well as related subjects of general interest to your supporters and those you wish to become supporters in the future.

A Blog is not simply an online means to solicit donations. If all you do with your blog is beseech readers to "Please Send Money" you miss the point, and you will miss the boat in web 2.0. Remember the third law: CONTENT IS KING. If all your blog does is expound on needs, you will turn readers off. Everyone wants to be a "winner" and wants to be associated with winning. Blog about your organization's victories and your clients' success stories. If you focus only on the conditions of those in need, you are focusing on your inability to reach them and your failure to help them. You may truly lack the resources to address those problems, but don't focus on what you lack. No one, including your supporters, wants to be associated with failure. It is all a matter of perspective and attitude. Be positive and focus on your victories and how much more you're going to accomplish. Do not focus on your how bad things are and how overwhelming the problems are.

Your organization's blog may be written by an individual or a team of individuals and it should be updated regularly, (I recommend at least 3 times per week). A blog should always be topical, helpful, and interesting. Writing about how you found a unique way to serve a client, tips on valuing non-cash gifts to nonprofit organizations, a new program you're offering, how you effectively reduced expenses to serve more clients, and success stories about clients, etc. are all potential subjects, some of which can be ongoing.

A quick Internet search of "free blog service" will reveal a number of free blog services available on the Internet. A "blog service ratings" search will give you comparisons you may be able to use as well. With regard to "How To" there is an enormous amount of free instructional information on using blog services available on the web or you can purchase a book on the subject. I would recommend spending time reading some blogs prior to launching your own in order to get a feel for what is available. Don't hesitate to open an account and try it out to get a feel for what is involved in blogging.

Tip: Link your blog to your website. Some web hosting companies provide blog hosting software as part of their hosting services, allowing you to not only link your blog to your website, but to actually incorporate it into your website.

Technically blogging isn't too difficult and can be learned quickly using information available through blogging providers and other Internet sources. Your greatest challenge may be coming up with blog topics and actually writing your blogs. Because of the challenge of identifying topics and the time required for writing, you may wish to consider a team approach. For example: Put together a team of say, three people, each of whom will post one blog a week. Then gather the team for an hour or so and through brainstorming come up with a list of topics or ideas. Note: Blogs can be short or long. A few hundred words are sufficient as long as they are helpful and informative on a sufficiently interesting topic. Some topics may generate longer blogs that can be broken down into multiple postings which can promote ongoing readership.

Tip: You may find it desirable to have topics and blogs submitted to your communications team leader for approval prior to posting. In light of the fact that you are using it as an organizational communications tool, you want to avoid controversial topics and subjects which may reveal personal information about clients or employees.

Here's a brief example of how a blog can be used:

- 1) Write your blog and post it. Include links to your website for additional or related information where appropriate.
- 2) Promote your blog using social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Interested readers will be referred to your website for more information and presented with the opportunity to subscribe to your e-newsletter.
- 3) E-newsletter subscribers translate into more supporters, and if you have [monetized your e-newsletter with Corande Publishing](#), directly raise funds for your programs.
- 4) In each issue e-newsletter Subscribers are invited to forward their e-newsletter to like-minded friends and family members, who are exposed to your organization and provided the opportunity to subscribe as well.
- 5) As your e-newsletter subscribership grows, your support grows and through Corande Publishing you have the opportunity to attract more and larger corporate sponsors to partner with.

This example should have awakened some idea of the possibilities and revealed the essence of web 2.0 strategy. Put interesting and helpful content on the web, promote that content through a "net" of web 2.0 tools linking to that content and let your "net" draw support from the vast sea of Internet users.

FACEBOOK – A Social Gateway to Millions

Facebook has become firmly entrenched in society. Facebook has more members than the population of most countries. Although there are rumors that Facebook intends to start charging users, I would not leave it out of my Web 2.0 toolbox on the chance that at some point in the future it may cease to be free.

We won't go into great detail about how to open up an account in Facebook or manage it. There are plenty "how-to" guides available. You can start with [Facebook](#) itself, check out guides available on [Mashable.com](#) or purchase a book on the subject.

What we will discuss are some of the methods you can use to promote your cause to Facebook users. Because Facebook seems to be constantly tweaking its program, I'll try to stick with basic tactics that should be applicable regardless of the program changes that seem to be constantly taking place.

There are five basic features in Facebook that you may employ in support of your nonprofit cause. They are:

1. Your basic Facebook account.
2. Facebook Groups
3. Facebook Pages
4. Facebook Applications (Apps)
5. Facebook Ads

Your Facebook account:

Opening a Facebook account is free. It takes only a few minutes and requires a name and an email address. Once you open an account you look for friends already on Facebook and invite them to become "Facebook Friends". You can post messages on friend's "walls" and conduct online chats through Facebook. Your account opens the door to online discussions you can take part in. Social success online means contributing topical, interesting and helpful comments, just like the real world. Be polite, pay attention first and inject commentary only if it is topical and contributes to the conversation. If you get on Facebook and hammer away at people with no consideration as to what is going on with other members you will find yourself ignored at best and may do more damage to your cause than good.

There is a saying, "*People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care*". Facebook members will quickly pick up on it if you are one dimensional and your every comment is based on promoting your cause. You will discover quickly that most people avoid fanatics.

Facebook Groups

Facebook groups are essentially a group of users who share a common interest. They are easy to join and provide an opportunity to interact with others who share your interests. Facebook Groups can present a real opportunity to introduce your

organization to like-minded members. It is simple to set up a group and can provide some real benefit to your organization. For instance, if your organization's cause is preserving "Widget Habitat" you can join or set up a group for "Widget Lovers" and through it identify fellow members who care deeply about "Widgets". Through the group you can provide links to "Widget-related" information which appears on a website or in a blog. You can post links to YouTube video about "Widgets". All of this can be done easily through groups without appearing to be a fanatic because the group was set up expressly for Widget Lovers.

Tip: To put the above example to practical use, set up your Facebook account, perform a group search for interest groups related to your cause and join them. If there isn't one, it is easy to start one. Once you are a group member, participate appropriately in the group, providing useful, informative, and interesting information about your shared interest. Make it a practice to genuinely participate first and promote your organization only when it is appropriate.

Facebook Pages

Facebook "Pages" work similarly to groups. Users become fans of a page versus members of a group. A page can be launched by any user. The page option does carry with it the unique ability to install a widget which allows some online interaction, for example: a subscription form. Outside of this feature, I have never seen an overwhelming advantage to Pages over Groups. I recommend you explore both, but select only one and focus on doing it well. The interactive feature in pages isn't a great advantage and a similar result can be achieved by posting a link on your group page to an online subscription form, etc. Additionally, recent changes in Facebook have halted member notification of page changes which helped keep fans engaged. Tip: Groups typically grow faster and attract a larger following than pages due largely to an easy-to-use "share" feature.

Facebook Applications

It may be possible to create a custom application to promote your cause, but the inherent programming expense involved and the potential liability should your app result in damaging users computers make me hesitant to advise anyone to take that route. If done properly it could be a useful tool, but even if you produce a popular app involving your cause, you then have to find a way to turn it into real-world support. At this time I don't see apps as a viable tool for most nonprofits.

Facebook Ads

Facebook sells advertising space and you can pay to have a link to your organization's website appear on users pages based upon specific criteria like age, gender, interests, etc. This is another option but only those who are prepared to pay for click-throughs should engage in it. It could be used to invite members to donate to your cause, but I haven't seen any specific data indicating it to be a cost-effective option in the case of nonprofits.

TWITTER – A Little Information Can Go A Long Way

I have to admit that when I first started hearing about Twitter, I was somewhat doubtful as to its usefulness. Essentially I saw Twitter as little more than text messaging on steroids and one of the first questions that came to mind was: “How much useful information can you really pack into 140 characters?”

At the same time I had to acknowledge that Twitter has a huge user base, Twitter is extremely popular with youth and young adults and reaching out to this demographic is important for the future health of nonprofit organizations. Knowing these facts, instead of asking IF Twitter can be used to promote involvement in nonprofit causes and organizations, we must focus on HOW Twitter can be used to promote involvement with nonprofit causes and organizations.

This question in some form should be asked in nonprofit boardrooms around the world. It is time to stop asking IF Social Media and the Web can have an impact, accept that it IS having an impact, and get down to the HOW you can use it to positively impact your organization. The future health of your organization and perhaps the nonprofit industry in general demands it.

This brief exploration of the subject will share some ideas on ways to use Twitter to draw attention to your cause, publicize events and promote programs to Twitter followers. The principles should sound familiar to followers of this blog and are applicable to the use of social media tools in general.

In order to use Twitter you must of course set up a Twitter account and attract followers. Setting up a Twitter account is fairly easy and it is free. I won't go into the details of setting up an account because it is pretty simple and there's plenty of free information on the subject available free on the Internet. The second step, attracting followers, is not difficult either but unless you're a celebrity it may take a little while.

Once you have set up an account your first move should be to start following tweeters who share your interest in your cause. The primary tool you will use to accomplish this is the Twitter search tool, specifically the advanced search. Using this tool you can, similar to Google search, input a word or phrase and perform a search to find tweets on the subject. Once you have found tweets on your topic of interest, you simply start following them. You will be pleasantly surprised to find that many of them will then start following you. As you contribute positively to the ongoing discourse on related subjects, more Twitter users will find you and additional followers will ensue. The trick is to contribute positively and regularly.

I recommend you spend a little time following tweets before you start posting. When you do begin posting, as in any social media, don't be one dimensional that every post you make points back to your website, your blog, and your Facebook group. To put it bluntly, it isn't all about you. Engage in social media

conversation without blowing your own horn every time. It will establish you as a contributor to the dialogue and not just a user trying to leverage the dialogue exclusively for your own benefit. Your cause and your organization benefit, directly and indirectly, every time you contribute positively. When there is an obvious connection to a topic, point Twitter followers to your online content that supporters will find interesting. For example: events, new programs and new services can be announced or promoted through Twitter and links provided to your website for more information.

I repeat: your tweets should not exclusively point to your website, Facebook page, or blog every time you post, but if you're providing quality content in those media tools, it will naturally happen frequently. A good rule of thumb is to reference your content about half the time, assuming you're providing good content.

Understand that regardless of where it comes from, linking to interesting and valuable content establishes your website, Twitter page, Facebook group, etc. as a resource for individuals interested in your cause. Having a reputation as a "portal" to valuable cause-specific content and resources is an excellent way to build Internet traffic which enhances your organization and builds support.

In other words, Content is King, regardless of where it comes from and if you don't have the time or ability to generate much of it, link to the good content that is available. After all, for the most part newspapers and news broadcasts don't create the news, they just report it. If content is a challenge for you, you can do essentially the same thing using Twitter, Facebook, your website, LinkedIn, [your e-newsletter](#) and other social media tools. Find the good content and report it regularly and you will as a result gain followers and fans.

LINKEDIN – Linking People and Ideas

There is a quote from Victor Hugo that has been paraphrased from its original French as, "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come." The Web is an idea whose time has come and there are media companies who can confirm the truth behind this statement relative to their subscribers migrating to the Web for information. LinkedIn is a portal to ideas and ideas are important.

Some may not agree that LinkedIn should be part of a nonprofit organization's web strategy. It is true that LinkedIn does not offer the same sort of social cause-related atmosphere and interactivity that can be found on Facebook and the like. I understand their perspective. On the other hand, LinkedIn opens up an array of groups and networks in such areas as Alumni Groups, Charity Groups, Conferencing Groups and others that can provide access to thousands of members and more important, the free exchange of ideas among professional peers on specific industry-related topics.

Through a group membership you can follow discussions, engage in discussions, and get discussion updates via email. All of this is available free on LinkedIn and it takes only minutes to sign up and start building relationships with your peers.

For example, I just applied to the LinkedIn group "Future Social Media", which examines how brands can promote themselves on emerging social media platforms. While to some this may sound exclusively business-oriented in nature, you should understand that your nonprofit is a brand. Your organization's image and reputation, will directly affect its ability to fundraise and to speak with authority to issues related to its areas of concern.

Learning how to promote your brand should be of utmost importance to everyone who is, or wishes to be, in a leadership position in the nonprofit industry. Ask yourself the question, would it be good for your organization to have the brand recognition of Coca Cola? LinkedIn can provide you the opportunity to learn about many subjects through interaction with professionals and links to relevant information.

For these reasons I recommend that every leader of a nonprofit organization at every level be a member of LinkedIn and/or similar groups and regularly engage in the exchange of ideas that takes place within groups affiliated with their profession. It is networks like LinkedIn that will spawn the ideas which may determine the success or failure of your organization in the future. They are virtual idea incubators.

Belonging to LinkedIn, or similar professional networking sites allows you to keep a finger on the online pulse of your industry or cause. Knowing what is happening with peer organizations, what is working, what is not working, and how your

organization's web strategy compares with others in your industry is valuable information.

And while you're at it, join your alumni group. It can't hurt to publicize your organization to a few thousand members, some of whom may be business owners and leaders looking for a worthy organization to partner with.

VIDEO – What Is A Picture is Worth?

Do you need to employ video in your media strategy? Almost everyone has seen at least one popular viral video either online or on television and can imagine the impact it could have. But you should realize that viral video isn't the only option you have available. The business sector understands the broad power of visual communications and invests tens of thousands of dollars just to have a product or logo appear in the background of a feature film. Product placement is far removed from viral but unquestionably effective. (Millions still remember E.T.'s favorite candy from an 1982 film)

When it comes to moving people to action, video can be extremely effective; a fact that has been proven by the advertising industry. If video didn't have the power to influence you can bet that businesses would not be spending millions of dollars per year for the honor of interrupting your favorite TV shows with commercials. Whether it is laughter or tears, video can move people. (Note: Happiness is more memorable than sadness)

This influential medium is now available to almost anyone thanks to reasonably priced video cameras, editing software, and online applications like YouTube. In a very true sense, just about anyone or any organization can promote themselves on video and distribute it freely across the Internet at minimal cost. An entertaining or funny video can spread around the world quickly through social media and carry your message to thousands, if not millions. Even if you do not have a great idea for a viral video, here are some practical video applications you can work on while you wait for inspiration.

- 1) It is not a coincidence that television news programs often lead off with a human interest story. Human interest stories attract viewers and your nonprofit organization should be able to tap into this inclination. Create a video recounting a success story related to your organization, post it on YouTube, and feature it on your website to give visitors an example of what your organization can achieve. People like to identify with winners so make your video a story on how your organization serves as an agent for positive change.
- 2) Create your own short simple commercials and feature them on appropriate pages of your website. A video can welcome visitors, introduce a new program, promote the opening of a new facility or highlight a fun [fundraising](#) event. Make your video informative and sufficiently short to hold viewer interest.
- 3) Video a personal message, a thank-you or an appeal from a leader or recognizable personality. You can post it on your website or link to it from

an [e-newsletter](#) and deliver it to your entire support base at almost no cost to your organization.

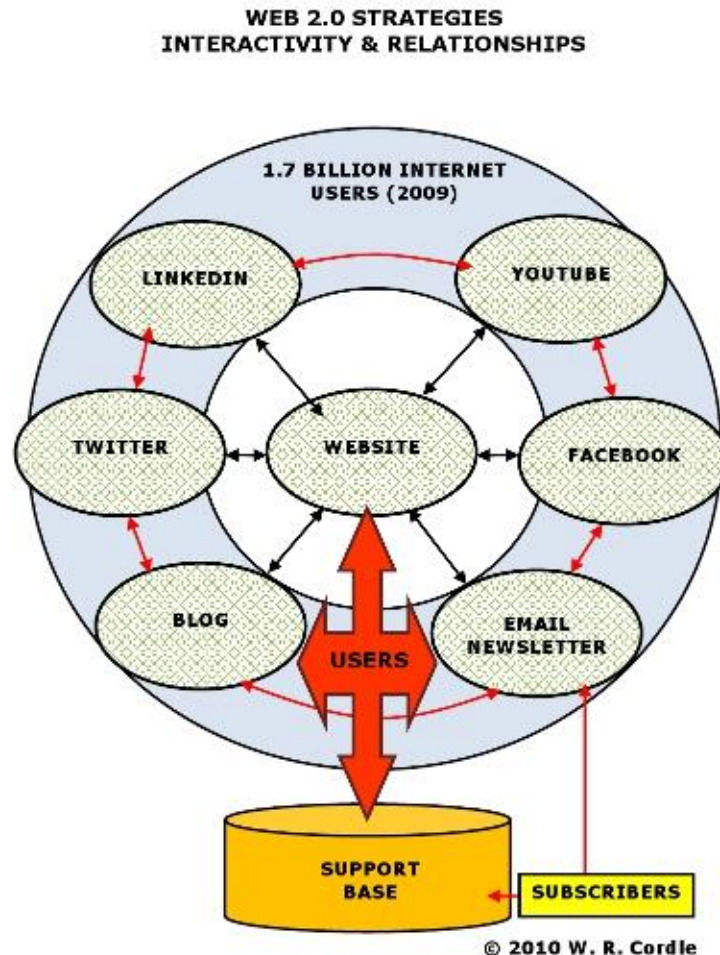
A few cautionary considerations you should consider when filming a video or preparing a video script:

- a) Be sure to get signed permission before you share someone's personal story or change the details sufficiently so that the subjects cannot be identified. (It isn't a bad idea to do both)
- b) Always get permissions in writing and make sure everyone appearing in a video signs a release form.
- c) Take precautions to make sure your video doesn't come across as an attempt to guilt-trip viewers into supporting your cause. No one enjoys guilt trips.
- d) Make sure your facts are absolutely correct. When you quote statistics double check them and identify your source. If you quote manipulated statistics, it could cost your organization its reputation. I recently read online a shockingly high statistic about violence attributed to a government survey. When I looked into the report I discovered that buried in the small print it had used eighteen months of data to represent a twelve month period. These figures had been intentionally inflated by fifty percent; probably to justify department funding. The organization that used these figures is taking a chance on their reputation that could come back to haunt them.

There are plenty of instructions on the technical aspect of using video online available through websites like [Mashable.com](#) and in books available at your local bookstore. Do some research, create a script, and shoot some video. You don't have to be an expert to shoot video because you can shoot as many takes as you need until you get something you like. Experiment and encourage your staff and supporters to do the same and submit it for consideration. You may soon find yourself with plenty of material to work with.

SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION – A Virtual Public Relations Network

Now that we have covered a number of the tools available through social media it is time to consider how these tools can be employed in an interactive manner to attract support, both volunteer and financial. First let's take a look at a chart which to some degree demonstrates the interactivity we wish to achieve.



The above chart indicates a worldwide pool of Internet users with your website at the center and various social media/web 2.0 tools positioned throughout the pool. These tools direct users both to other tools and to your website. These tools and your website are designed to lead users to become supporters and lead supporters to engage in ongoing activity among the various tools.

The strategy is to attract as many users as possible to join your support base and then convert those supporters into real volunteer and financial support. To accomplish this you approach the situation much as a working fisherman does. The more nets a fisherman has in the water, the more fish he is likely to catch. Correspondingly, you should place as many interactive social media "nets" in the sea of Internet users as you and your team can properly handle. Start with what you can handle and as your abilities allow, add more "nets".

As you attract users the interactivity of these “nets” ultimately leads the users to your website, your primary point of contact on the web. At your website you provide quality content and opportunities to support your organization in terms of volunteer activities and fundraising. In order to establish an ongoing relationship with these users you want to induce them to subscribe to your monthly e-newsletter. If you have partnered with [Corande Publishing](#) for [free e-newsletter services](#), the simple act of subscribing provides you with the opportunity to raise funds for your programs at no cost to either your organization or the user. You can tastefully present visitors with this painless means to support your cause on your website.

Each of the web 2.0 tools previously mentioned in this report provides supporters with the opportunity to further support your organization by interacting with family and friends through the various tools. By doing so they quite literally cast your net into the pool of their friends and family who are active on the Internet and recommend they get involved. In a sense, by providing good content through your e-newsletter and social media, and encouraging supporters to share this content with like-minded friends and family, you convert them into a self-reproducing body of volunteers, continually gleaning new supporters from their pool of contacts.

Utilize these tools wisely and consistently, and you can establish your organization as a leader in both your cause and in today’s nonprofit industry. [A recent survey](#) has established that today’s donors want their organizations to utilize email and social media more. They see destroying forests for the purpose of direct mail as irresponsible behavior. They see organizations that don’t intelligently use email and social media as irrelevant in the real world they live in.

Get focused and get up to speed, the future is here and, whether you like it or not, your organization is going to have to function in it or falter. There are more web 2.0 tools available than virtually any organization could reasonably manage, but by being flexible, selecting those you can handle and using them wisely, your organization can grow and prosper.

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