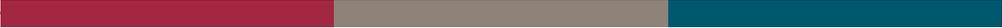*July 2017*

Creating a Digital Marketing Strategy

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Investing in Better Health for People and Communities

CREATING A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

There is no question that the explosion in technology has significantly changed the marketing landscape. Social media, blogs, websites, and email marketing are some of the tools now available to help you reach your audience online and can be important elements of your overall communications approach. With so many choices, it can be overwhelming determining where you should devote your resources.

A digital strategy is really no different than a traditional marketing strategy except for the specific tools employed. In fact, a digital strategy should be integrated into your overall marketing communications plan.

Consider online communications a key element of your overall marketing communications toolkit. With that in mind, it is important to consider their use in light of your communications objectives, brand personality, audiences, and resources. The following is designed to help you create a digital strategy for your organization that should help create a framework for your online communications.

WHAT ENCOMPASSES A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY?

A digital campaign can include a variety of online tools such as:

- Website

- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest and more!)

- YouTube or other video sharing sites

- Blogs

- E-newsletters/email communications

- Online advertising

To be effective in using any, all, or some combination of these tools, it is critical to develop an overall strategy to help guide you in choosing the right tools, developing an appropriate "on-line persona," developing content to support your brand, and establishing a timeline and process to keep your content up-to-date and relevant.

DO YOUR BRAND HOMEWORK FIRST

Ideally, before you have established an online presence, you should have given some thought to your overall communications objectives, targeted audiences, key messages and brand identity. These form the basis of your communications planning and should be well established before you embark on your digital strategy. With a strong understanding of what you are trying to accomplish, who you are trying to reach, and an effective messaging platform, you will be better prepared to develop a strong online presence and determine which digital tools are most effective for your organization.

AUDIT YOUR CURRENT ONLINE TOOLS

Armed with a strong understanding of your objectives and brand, a good starting point is to take an inventory of the online tools you are currently using to determine if they fit your needs or if an update is in order.

Review the following and consider their effectiveness:

- Review copy and messaging on online tools (website, social media, e-newsletter, blogs). Are your key messages standing out? Does the reader come away with a clear sense of who your organization is?

- Review images, photos and other visuals to determine if they support your brand identity and convey the appropriate tone and personality.

- Understand the audiences who are most likely

to use the tools you have chosen – do the tools match up with your key audiences? An email campaign to teenagers or a Snapchat approach to seniors may be a waste of your resources!

- Review available analytics including website traffic numbers, audience size, and engagement to determine if your online communications are effective in reaching your intended audiences and which elements (website pages, specific posts, email "opens") resonate more than others.

After this assessment, you will have a better idea of where you may need to make changes and what tools might be more effective.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PLATFORMS

It's important to consider your audience, both in terms of age, geographic location, and lifestyle when choosing the places that you can reach them most effectively. In addition to evaluating your organization's effectiveness on current platforms, learn more about specific tools and their audiences to determine if your key audiences are using these.

Websites
For most organizations, a website is a must and can form the basis for your overall online presence. It also provides a place for more in-depth information and is typically where you want to push your key audiences so they can learn more about your organization. Again, your brand identity should be integrated into your website and include key messaging throughout. Pay attention to design and other visual elements to ensure it conveys your organizations brand.

Social Media
Social media sites have their own personalities and audiences, so be sure to do some research to determine what is the best platform for your organization. It may be more effective to choose one or two and focus on using these

really effectively, rather than trying to establish a presence on too many platforms at once, particularly if you don't have deep expertise working with these sites. After you have had a chance to effectively reach your audience on one, you may want to add another as you become more proficient and have developed content that lends itself to other platforms.

Video Sharing Services (YouTube and Vimeo)
If you have strong video content that helps your organization tell its story (think testimonials, event videos or feature stories about your impact), consider setting up a video-sharing channel as a place to post your video content that is easy to find for viewers. This content can also be posted to your website or social media channels as well.

Email Newsletters/Email Marketing
Many non-profit organizations have a "built in" audience that actively seeks information from them. This audience may include partners, clients, or donors that you want to communicate with regularly about upcoming events, news, or other updates. Email marketing in the form of regular updates or online newsletters can be very effective in sharing information, particularly from a receptive audience. There are a number of free online services such as MailChimp or Constant Contact that can be used and provide easy-to-use templates and database management services.

Online Advertising
Online advertising can be very cost effective and targeted to a particular audience so you might want to consider using it, particularly if you are focused on a specific call to action for your audience. You can work through Facebook, Google or other online mediums to set up ads targeted to audiences of your choice or consider working with an expert in the field to help develop an overall campaign.

Google even provides grants for Google Ad Words to help support nonprofits. Click here for details.

DEVELOP A SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT STRATEGY

Once you have determined which social media sites you will use, you will then need to set up the basic information about the organization (your profile) that should include your key messaging and images that support your brand. Typically this information is fairly brief but can make an impact. The information you include in specific posts should also support the brand.

Since the purpose of social media is to engage an audience as a two-way conversation, new content is paramount. It is critical to add new material on a regular basis to keep the site fresh and **give viewers a reason to pay attention.** It can be a time-consuming task – one that takes time to plan and post.

To develop your content strategy consider:

- What is your main objective with these audiences? (Donations? Event sign ups? Better understanding of your organization?)

- How can you integrate key messages? What supporting information helps to convey these messages?

- What is new/newsworthy? (Upcoming events, honors & awards, client success stories, and others)

- Are there other organizations whose information is relevant to share or to support your messaging?

- Are there seasonal topics to be addressed?

CONSIDER YOUR RESOURCES

While posting to social media seems like it doesn't require a lot of time, an effective site needs regular attention. Researching, writing, and designing posts as well as staying on top of other sites can be time consuming! Ideally, a specific staff person should have responsibility for your social media sites, however, make sure that he or she has time built into his or

her overall responsibilities. This person should also be fairly knowledgeable about your brand, messaging and the information that is suitable for posting. Narrowing your focus on only one or two sites may be necessary depending on the resources you have to devote to upkeep.

Photos, videos, and graphics are much more engaging for most viewers, so consider your resources in these areas. If you do not have a depth of these assets, take some time to get some photos or video of your operations, events or the people you serve to begin to create a library of materials for use on social media even if photos are from a cell phone.

CREATE A CALENDAR/TIMELINE

With these considerations in mind, it is time to create a content calendar in order to organize your potential posts and to create a road map for the foreseeable future of information that can be included on your social media sites. By outlining content and assigning a timeframe, you can better plan your posts and ensure that your sites are always updated.

Flexibility is also important as new information will present itself or there may be new events or activity that you want to promote. Also, keep an eye on other relevant sites so that you can "share" or "retweet" information that would be relevant to your audiences. This may also encourage those organizations to reciprocate and share your information, giving you an opportunity to increase your audience.

ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

As you build your profile and your overall content, consider ways to engage your audience including these considerations:

- Viewers are drawn to photos and video

- Keep copy fairly short

- Answer questions and respond to comments when appropriate

- Ask for input or thoughts on topics to connect with your audiences

- Keep things current/timely

- Link viewers to your website for lengthier stories and information

- Highlight donors and supporters of your organization

- Tag other organizations or individuals to alert them to your posts

- Continually add new content!

REVIEW AND REFINE

Since most online tools provide some way to quantify traffic (website page views, page likes, followers, email opens etc.) you can instantly see what information is gaining attention. Take the time to review all analytics available and adjust your content accordingly. Take note of whether or not a certain type of information seems to resonate (videos versus photos for instance) and consider adjusting your resources to develop materials that seem to be accessed most often.

PROMOTE YOUR ONLINE CHANNELS

In order to build your audiences, remember to cross promote your website address, social media sites and email sign ups so that your audience has a number of ways to engage with your organization.

USE TECHSOUP AND NETSQUARED WHENEVER POSSIBLE

NetSquared brings together nonprofits and activists, tech leaders and funders, and everyone who's interested in using technology for social change. It is a program of TechSoup, a global nonprofit that provides eligible organizations with donated and discounted hardware, software, IT services and training. It gives nonprofits access to the IT resources they need to improve lives and is supported by some of the world's largest foundations including the Carnegie, Ford, Gates and Rockefeller Foundations. Through NetSquared, hands-on support such as IT assessments, software recommendations, data management guidance and training are brought to nonprofits at the local level by volunteer experts.

Using these resources is a great way to save money and stay up on the newest in technology.

For more information on NetSquared Buffalo, visit https://net2buffalo.org. For more information on TechSoup, visit https://techsoup.org.

CONSIDER OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE

Technology is constantly evolving and there are far more tools and sites that can provide additional support for your online presence than what is outlined here. Research as much as possible, share information with other professionals, and take advantage of forums that teach the fundamentals of digital tools when possible!

There are also firms who are experts in digital marketing that may also help you build your overall strategy and assist with specific tools, depending on your budget.