

Online Social Networking Tips

So you have heard about Facebook, MySpace and the plethora of other online social networking sites that are out in the universe. The question is, can they help your organization? In a word, yes. Once you get a profile up and running, online social networking sites can help you reach a wide audience of people quickly. You can send messages to your network, post information about upcoming events, and even do online fundraising. There are lots of great articles out there about how to set up a profile, and then how to leverage your connections to create a broad network. But to make life easier, I have condensed the articles into a few key points:

1. **Devote time and manpower to your page.** Facebook and MySpace pages are great places for providing information about your organization, posting details about upcoming events, and even promoting new programs or causes. However, if you never update your organization's page, people will likely stop visiting it, and this will defeat the whole purpose of your page. In order to make the most of your page, make sure there is an individual who can devote some time each week to checking comments, posting new information, pictures or events, and if necessary, responding to comments. If you are not ready to take on this time commitment (at least a few hours a week), it's probably best to forego a page.
2. **Let go of control.** Facebook and MySpace allow your friends and people in your networks to post comments on your page. You will not be able to control what people post on your profiles. Although you can delete people's comments, this is not something you want to do regularly. Your friends will not appreciate it if you are constantly deleting their comments.
3. **Network.** Once you have accepted the responsibility of creating and updating a profile, start networking! You can use search features to find people you know who already have Facebook or MySpace profiles. Once you find these people, invite them to be your friends. Once you have a few friends, you can begin broadening your network by inviting *their* friends to be your friends. Do this regularly and your online network will grow quickly, letting you reach many new people.
4. **Keep it fresh.** Part of the fun of online social networking sites is the ease with which you can share pictures and watch video clips. Keep your site fresh and exciting by regularly uploading new multimedia content that will keep people engaged and help them remember your site.

5. **Funnel your friends to your website.** Remember to post links to your homepage on your Facebook or MySpace profiles. That way, you can easily capture your new friends' email addresses by having them join your organization's email list.

To learn more specifics about creating and maintaining an online social networking profile for your organization, check out the following articles:

Ten Commandments of MySpace Advocacy

<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page6915.cfm>

A Beginner's Guide to Facebook

<http://www.wildapricot.com/blogs/newsblog/archive/2007/05/23/put-your-non-profit-on-facebook.aspx>

Promote Your Cause on Facebook in Six Easy Steps

<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page7416.cfm>