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Twitter Best Practices for Nonprofit Organizations



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1. Authenticity before marketing. Have personality. Build community.

Those nonprofits who are most successful at utilizing social networking websites like Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace know from trial, error, and experience that a “marketing and development approach” on social networking sites does not work. Traditional marketing and development content is perfectly fine for your Web site and e-mail newsletters, but Web 2.0 is much more about having personality, inspiring conversation, and building online community. Nowhere is this more true than on Twitter. Relax, experiment, let go a bit... find your voice. Be authentic.

2. Be nice. Be thankful. Reply and Retweet!

Twitter is a great exercise in practicing Karma. The nicer you are to people in the Twitterverse, they nicer they are to you in return. The more you ReTweet (RT) others, the more they will RT you in return. And whether it's Twitter, MySpace, Facebook or YouTube, if someone does something nice for you in the online public commons, it is always a good practice to send them a message of “Thanks... much appreciated!”. Kindness and appreciation will make you stand out from the others and makes an excellent impression.

3. Follow on a 1:1 ratio if your goal is to have a lot of followers.

This is a hard one for a lot of nonprofits. They want to keep their “Home” view clutter free and controlled and only follow a select few. But I say this often... “This time it is not about you, it is about them.” Web 1.0 communications is all about us and our messaging i.e, your Web site and e-mail newsletter. Web 2.0 is all about your supporters and their messaging. Two things to keep in mind:

- 1) Your followers can't direct message you on Twitter if you are not following them.
- 2) People are more likely to follow you if they think you will follow them back.

Have a look around Twitter... you will see that those nonprofits with the most followers follow closely on a 1:1 ratio. If you still don't believe me, here's the [mathematical data](#) that supports the 1:1 follow ratio.

4. Use “Favorites” to organize the chaos and feature your most important Tweets!

So, if you are going to follow everyone who follows your organization (which is hopefully thousands of people) then “Favorite” Tweets by those who you are most interested in reading and favorite your most important Tweets. The favorites option on Twitter is a simple, excellent tool to help you organize the chaos.

5. Don't tweet about your coffee (unless it is fair trade), the weather, or how tired you are.

Provide value to your followers, not chit-chat! It's one thing to chit-chat about the weather, your headache, or how you need coffee to wake up in the morning on your personal profile on Twitter, but it's quite another if you are active on the Twitterverse via your organizational profile. The messages you send reflect upon your organization. Example of what not to Tweet: “Such-and-such Nonprofit got stuck in traffic this morning. Ugh! I need coffee and a vacation... and I think I am getting a headache!” No one likes a whiner and this just makes it sound like Such-and-Such Nonprofit is not a fun place to work. People follow you because they want good content from your organization on subjects relevant to your mission. Make sure your Tweets provide value and are Re-Tweetable.

6. Don't only Tweet your own content.

Twitter is a news source. Participate in news. Tweet articles or blog posts by your favorite newspapers, bloggers, or other nonprofits (yes... other nonprofits! Find allies, build relationships). If it is a good read or a good resource, it reflects well upon your organization that you Tweeted it. There is also a good chance you might get ReTweeted if the article is deemed timely and worthy by the Twitterverse.

7. Send messages, but not via auto-responders.

There are tools out there that will automatically message your new followers. Don't use them. It's Spam. It's not authentic. It's not human. It's lazy marketing. I think [this cartoon](#) sums up auto-responders perfectly.

8. Don't worry about those that “unfollow” you.

It's easy to feel slighted when someone stops following you. What did I say? Did I do something wrong? Let it go. Who knows why they followed you in the first place. Give it no more than 3 seconds thought and then move on.

9. Limit your Tweets to 5 per day, and no more than 6!

I have been polling on Twitter and the Twitterverse has revealed that less is more when it comes to Tweeting. See [poll results](#).

10. Twitter is what you make of it.

You get out of Twitter what you put into it. This is the same of all Web 2.0 social networking sites. Twitter is a fun, valuable tool that can drive significant traffic to your Web site (start watching your Web site referral logs!) and help build and strengthen your brand in the online world of Web 2.0, but just like Facebook and MySpace, Twitter requires time and energy to produce results. You get out of it what you put into it. If you do one Tweet a week, you will get the results of one Tweet. But if you Tweet 4 times daily Monday through Friday... you will get the results of 20 Tweets weekly.

Again, it's about community building around your mission and programs. Just having profile on Twitter (or MySpace, or Facebook) does not magically produce any results. You have to work these profiles. Find the person on your staff who loves Web 2.0 and enjoys working the sites and/or find a marketing/pr intern from your local university that needs to do a senior project! If they are getting college credit, then you know they have to stay around for at least a semester. :)

11. Create an account on Bit.ly and track your Twitter referral URLs.

After you have created an account on [Bit.ly](#), every website address that you shorten can be tracked. You can view stats on exactly how many people click the links you send out on Twitter in your Bit.ly account. This is a crucial best practice so you can track ROI and discover what content your followers are most interested in reading.

12. Poll your followers to increase participation.

[Twpoll.com](#) is a free service that allow your to create polls with your Twitter ID ([View Example Poll](#)). Folks on Twitter love anonymous polls, especially if they are bit controversial. Polls often get ReTweeted which can be great exposure for your nonprofit. Also, keep in mind that the polls can be posted on Facebook, MySpace, Change.org, etc.

13. Be like the National Wildlife Federation - have many Twitter accounts!

The National Wildlife Federation was early adopter of using social media and they have a very good sense of how to use it effectively and where its going. They have Twitter accounts for numerous campaigns and encourage their staff to Tweet ([View List of NWF Twitter Accounts](#)). The more people Tweeting and ReTweeting about your organization, the better!

14. Tweet powerful stats related to your organization's mission.

A surprising or shocking stat or factoid can be very powerful on Twitter because some people will be compelled to ReTweet the stat. Example: [@gorilladoctors](#) Only 740 mountain gorillas remain on Planet Earth. Sad, but true and definitely ReTweet worthy to animal lovers and activists.

15. Register your organization's Twitter account with TweetMeme.

[TweetMeme](#) is like [Digg](#), but with Tweets. Sign up for account and register your nonprofit's Twitter profile. It takes less than a minute and you only have to do it once. From there on out TweetMeme will automatically compute and broadcast the number of times your article has been ReTweeted, and by whom. A simple idea that could be very powerful for your organization if one of your Tweets/articles moves up the ranks and becomes a featured Tweet.

16. Add TweetMeme ReTweet Buttons to your website and blog.

[TweetMeme ReTweet Buttons](#) are for website and blog publishers who want to encourage their audience to tweet their content on Twitter. If folks are logged in to their Twitter account, all they need to do is click the button once and the ReTweet is posted. Try it... scroll to the top of this page to see it in action!

17. Favorite Tweets to build partnerships and organize Twitter profiles.

[FavStar.fm](#) is a tool that allows you to see if any of your Tweets have been Favorited by others on Twitter. If you work in close partnership with other nonprofits, then Favorite one of their Tweets. Favorite your funders or donors if they are in Twitter. The Favorites function is also a great way to organize Twitter profiles that you want to mention on [#FollowFriday](#) and in future ReTweets!

18. Tweet inspirational quotes.

It never fails. Tweeting relevant and inspiring quotes from famous people consistently gets more ReTweets than any other Tweet. Use this best practices sparingly though. There is a thin line between inspiring your followers and annoying them with too much mushiness [for lack of a better word]. One quote per week is a good starting point. Try it. Tweet: "Activism is my rent for living on this planet." - Alice Walker

19. Repeat your most popular Tweets.

Tweets that you have posted in that past that received a lot of traffic and were ReTweeted many times may be worthy of posting again. People are on Twitter at all times of the day all over the world, so a Tweet you posted on Monday at

10am, for example, that was well-received can be posted again 10 days later on Thursday at 3pm. The Favorites function easily allows you to bookmark, if you will, your most popular Tweets for future re-posting. As a general rule, popular Tweets can be reposted 3-4 times over a period of 6-8 weeks without losing their initial appeal.

20. Use Lists to build relationships with donors, volunteers, partner organizations, etc.

In these early days of Lists (November 2009), most nonprofits are using them to help organize Twitter chaos. The Humane Society of the United States has created a [list of partner humane societies](#). The AFL-CIO is organizing [AFL-CIO Unions](#) via Lists. And [Nonprofit Daily](#) is doing a great job of utilizing Lists to organize nonprofits. All very useful, but the Lists do not have a lot of followers and I don't think they ever will. That is Twitter Listing 101.

The next step is to use Lists a little more strategically. Not just to organize your followers and partner organizations, but rather to create Lists that people want to be on. Make a donation. Get Listed. Become a Volunteer. Get Listed. Try to think about Lists that you can create that people want to be on. Also, make sure you give your Followers [ideas](#) on how they can help your organization by utilizing Lists!

21. Ask your followers to subscribe to your e-Newsletter and Mobile Lists.

Over the years I have been consistently surprised by how many people will subscribe to my e-newsletter or mobile list once asked on a social media site. But not until I asked. I have tabled a number of events over the years asking people to sign up for e-mail newsletters, and the number of subscribers I get from social media trumps tabling any day of the week. Example Tweets:

Text NONPROFITORGS to 41411 to receive text alerts (2-3 monthly) from Nonprofit Tech 2.0! Thanks!

Sending out my Web 2.0 Best Practices e-Newsletter on Wednesday. To receive a copy, please subscribe! <http://bit.ly/2VeW7A>

22. Use #hashtags strategically.

If you use [hashtags](#) too often, then you dilute their usefulness. If every one of your tweets has a hashtag, some people will question your intentions for using them. There is such a thing as hashtag spamming. In the case of hashtags, I am a firm believer in less is more. Decide on 1-3 hashtags for your nonprofits, and use them repeatedly.

23. Claim your organizations's Give a Tweet profile.

If your nonprofit has a profile inside of Network for Good, then it has a profile on [GiveaTweet.com](#). Many Twitter fundraising tools have come and gone, but GiveaTweet has some great tools and a lot of potential. Learn More: [Three Reasons Why Nonprofits Should Give a Tweet](#)

24. Create a Twibbon for your organization or Cause.

Twibbon.com allows you and others to embed a Twibbon over your avatar on Twitter. For example: 1) [Support Breast Cancer Research](#). 2) [PETA](#) 3) [Support Haiti](#). It's fun, easy, and the Twittersverse likes them.

25. Use Trottr to record and broadcast short messages to your followers.

Trottr allows you to call a phone number, record a message, and then creates a short URL of the messages that can easily be Tweeted throughout the Internet. The possibilities are endless with this tool. Get creative, just don't use it too often. use it strategically. [Listen to my Trottr message!](#)

26. Add your organization's KEYWORD and SHORTCODE pitch to your Twitter Background.

Many nonprofits create custom backgrounds for their Twitter profiles to match their organization's branding. Some list their organization's website, blog, Facebook Page, YouTube Channel, etc. although they can not be hyperlinked. Additionally, and perhaps more effective, would be to add your organization's KEYWORD and SHORTCODE pitch, such as: Text HAITI to 90999 to donate \$10 the Red Cross! [Hint, Hint Red Cross]. For an axample, see the Twitter background [@greenhouseintl.](#)

27. Create and share custom backgrounds for your followers.

The organization Charity: Water has [Twitter backgrounds available for download](#) on their website for their supporters. [@Pistachio](#) is an example of a followers using one their backgrounds.

28. Use [STATS], [POLL], [PHOTO] and [VIDEO].

When Tweeting stats, polls, photos and videos make them more eye-catching and ReTweetable by adding [CAPS] at the beginning of the Tweet. For example:

[STATS] Twitter is Still Growing Rapidly :: Now more than 1 billion Tweets per month: <http://bit.ly/bWyMwW>

29. Go easy on the public "Thanks for the RTs!".

Thanks for the RT. Thanks for the RT. Thanks for the RT. Boring. You don't want your Twitter profile view to become overrun with monotony and smoozing. Use #ThankfulThursday or #FollowFriday to express public appreciation for RTs. You can also message them a "Thank You" directly. An occasional public "Thanks for the RT!" is fine, but everyday or a

few times a week is too much.

30. Enable Tweet Location.

Under Settings > Tweet Locations > Check the box enabling Tweet Location. There are an increasing number of third-party Twitter tools like [TwitPic](#) and [@2Gov.org](#) that use [geolocation](#) to empower your Tweets to show up on numerous maps and Twitter tools. Enabling Tweet Location increases exposure for your organization.

31. Tweet on the go from your mobile phone.

Whether you are on Capitol Hill, at a conference, having a board meeting, attending a gala, or at a protest, you can Tweet live from events using [m.twitter.com](#) or [Twitter smartphone Apps](#). Nonprofit Tweeters should think of themselves as reporters during these events.

32. Ask your followers to "Please RT!"

One of the [top twenty most ReTweetable phrases](#) on Twitter is "Please RT!" Sometimes all you need to do is ask.

33. Monitor your Tweet Stats.

[TweetStats](#) is a mostly fun, kind of useful third-party Twitter App that will dissect your Tweets and Replies by hour, week and month. Their [Trends](#) and [Popular Apps and Tweep](#) pages are interesting too.

34. Sync your Twitter account with MySpace.

If your nonprofit once used MySpace, but have not logged in a while, then sync your Twitter account with MySpace to have your Tweets imported into MySpace Status Updates. Most MySpace Pages still show up in the top results in Google and there are still over 40 million Americans that use the site monthly. It's better to engage your community there through automation than just abandon them. In general, automation between social networking communities is a bad idea, but not in this case. More Info: [Why Nonprofits Should Sync Their Twitter and MySpace Accounts](#).

35. Add a Twitter Tab to your Facebook Page.

Make sure you are logged into Facebook and designated as an Admin for your organization's Facebook Page. Go to [Involver's App Gallery](#) [You can install two of the basic Apps for free]. Click the Facebook Install button for Twitter. It will ask you to choose which Facebook Page you want to install the App. Select your page and then click the "Add Twitter for Pages" button. You will then be prompted to enter your name, email address, phone number, and Twitter User Name. All four fields are required.

Click "Save & Continue" and then "Continue to Fan Page". The final step is to click "+ Add a new tab" on your Facebook Page, then Select "Twitter". The Twitter Tab will automatically appear. You can then drag and drop your Tabs in the order you think it most important for your Facebook Strategy. Keep in mind that the default settings are that the "Wall" Tab is first, the "Info" Tab is second. [\[See the Involver Twitter App live\]](#)

36. Don't sync Twitter with LinkedIn and Facebook!

Every community is unique. While it is fine to post five or more Tweets per day on Twitter (as long as they are spread out through the day), five Status Updates on Facebook and/or LinkedIn is annoying to most people. Syncing Twitter with most social networks ([Myspace is an exception](#)) is a huge mistake. People don't want to be overtly marketed to on social networks, [nor do they want to follow bots](#). Syncing Twitter with Facebook and LinkedIn is exactly that. If you don't have time to manage numerous communities on social networks, then it is better to do one right rather than all three wrong.

37. Customize your Twitter avatar for special fundraising or awareness campaigns.

If your organization is running a special fundraising or awareness campaign, get a custom avatar designed for the campaign. Just make sure that the various versions of your avatar also include your logo. The vast majority of the time your avatar should be a square version of your logo (that you also use consistently on all social networking sites), but for special campaigns changing your avatar can help get your campaign noticed. You can also create a [Twibbon](#) for your campaigns.

38. Get professional training on how use Twitter!

Knowing how to use social media in your personal life is quite different from knowing how to use it professionally. Training is essential for launching and maintaining a successful social media strategy for your organization. Be sure to take DIOSA's Webinar on [How to Nonprofit Organizations Can Successfully Use Twitter and Twitter Apps](#).

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