

Using Social Networking as a Fundraising Tool

Aim: With millions of people around the world now using social networking sites on a daily basis it makes perfect sense for animal welfare organisations to take advantage of this free fundraising tool. This document provides an overview of the main social networking sites and ideas of how to use these sites to promote your organisation and to raise funds.

Introduction

With millions of people around the world now using social networking sites on a daily basis it makes perfect sense for animal welfare organisations to take advantage of this free fundraising tool!

You may feel overwhelmed with the amount of networking sites currently available on the web and uncertain about which ones will be most beneficial for your organisation. Each social networking site is characteristically different and reaches a variety of audiences, but ultimately they can all be used by your organisation to raise awareness of your work, and potentially to recruit a large numbers of supporters, without too much effort or expense.

To give you an idea of what is out there we have listed the most popular sites and how you can start social networking.

Facebook 'Causes'

'Causes' on Facebook is an application that has been created to allow users to highlight their cause on their Facebook page. Once signed up to Facebook users can start their own 'Cause' and have total administrative rights to that page.

Once you have set up your page you can upload video clips, and photos illustrating your work, you can invite other users to be your friend, you can then invite their friends to be your friends, and in this way build up whole networks. Additionally, you can send images, links and details to anyone who has associated themselves with your cause, publicise and recruit for your events, campaigns, or petitions.

It is a great way to give your supporters the feeling of being part of a movement or community. Organisations can benefit from the millions of users of Facebook worldwide. It is the second largest social network on the web, behind only MySpace in terms of traffic. One million people are active on Facebook every day. The fastest growing demographic are people 30 years old and above.



MySpace 'Impact'

'Impact' on MySpace is a charity channel designed to act as a hub for campaigning, charity and social action. There are options to start brand new campaigns, volunteering time, spreading positive word of mouth or raising money for chosen causes through MySpace user's personal profiles.

In turn, organisations can set up and customise their own profile page with news, videos, fundraising tools and other campaign resources such as call-to-action alerts for volunteers. Users can also raise money for causes directly from their profile.

Another option available to users is downloadable widgets; these are little buttons or programmes that can sit on your websites including your social networking sites. They can be used for different things, i.e. games, advertising, short cuts to other web pages and applications, which can be used to link to your own website.

An analysis of visitors to MySpace shows that as the site has experienced dramatic visitor growth, it has become more popular among older Internet users. Internet users between the ages of 35-54 now account for 40.6% of the MySpace visitor base.

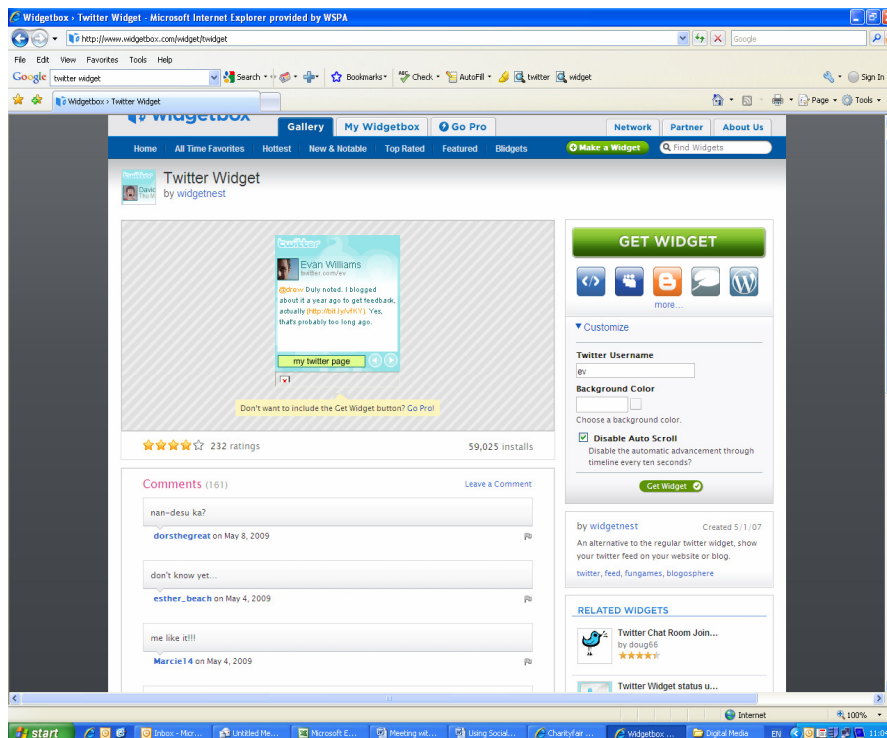
The screenshot shows the MySpace Impact website in a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar displays the URL <http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=impact>. The browser's menu bar includes File, Edit, View, Favorites, Tools, and Help. The toolbar contains various icons for navigation and search. The website's header features a navigation menu with links for Home, Browse, Find People, Forums, Music, Video, and More. A search bar is located in the top right corner, and there are links for Log In and Sign Up. The main content area is titled "MYSAPCE IMPACT" and includes a directory of Impact Non-Profit Orgs and Impact Politicians. The featured content includes a large banner for "THE ALZHEIMER'S PROJECT" with the text "A 4-PART DOCUMENTARY SERIES CHANGING THE WAY AMERICA THINKS ABOUT ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE" and "AN HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS, MULTIMEDIA EVENT STARTING MAY 10, 9PM HBO". Other featured content includes "IMPACT AWARDS" with the text "This month's category: ENVIRONMENTALISM" and "MySpace Impact Awards Health & Safety" with the text "We understand what your preconceptions of £1 travel may be." and "See how Citi Forward™ by MySpace™ cardmembers are making an Impact". The bottom of the page shows a "Featured Video" section with a video player and the text "Swine flu spread like wildfire last week—at least in the media. But where did it come from? | More Videos". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows several open applications, including "Inbox - Micro...", "Meeting with R...", "Using Social Net...", "Document.10 - ...", "Digital Media", "Google Mail - M...", "MySpace - Mkr...", and "EN". The system clock shows the time as 14:39.

Twitter

Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that allows its users to send and read other users' updates (known as tweets), which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length. Updates are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them. Users can receive updates via the Twitter website, SMS, or through applications such as, Facebook, and Twidget, a widget application. Twitter continuously exposes users to new posters and lets users follow each other.

At the top right of your Twitter homepage you will see a search box that lets you not only search for people, but also by location or any other term that might be in their Twitter profile - this is a good way to add and find friends who are Twittering in the same niche as you. Why not start with those that follow you and see who else they are following and what they Twitter about. You'll find that these followers will lead you to others, and so on. Twitter doesn't allow a lot of customisation - but the subtle things that it does allow you to change can have an impact. It is a good idea to promote your Twitter profile in numerous places such as your home page, Facebook or any blogs you do.

Your Avatar¹ is one important factor - it appears next to every Tweet you make as well as on your profile page. If you just allow the default brown avatar to represent you you're missing a great marketing opportunity. It is recommended to use an avatar that represents your organisation or your logo.



One example of how Twitter can be used to generate funds for charity is a recent fundraising campaign ran by the UK based National Trust, who decided to run an on-line Twitter campaign over a weekend to raise money for a new museum. Supporters were

¹ Avatar is a computer user's representation of himself/herself, or an organization.

encouraged to follow the charity and/or forward its appeals for funding to their followers. The Twitter campaign asked for micro-donations of \$2 (donations were handled using PayPal). Every time a person donated money to the campaign via Twitter donors were sent a personal recognition.

Incredibly by February 2009, Twitter had 55 million daily users. Males make up 63% of Twitterers. Twitter's largest age demographic is 35-to-44-year-olds who make up 25.9% of its users.



Tips for Successful Social Networking

Do it well!

Think realistically about the time you have. Don't try to tackle everything that's out there. It's better to do something well on one network rather than to be on lots of social networking sites but poorly represent your organisation.

Start with friends

Start with friends and supporters. While social networking offers a wide pool of potential contacts, users are attracted to these sites because they want to communicate with people they already know. Therefore the first step to successful social networking is to encourage interaction among a close-knit, pre-existing circle of friends and supporters.

Search for potential supporters

Once your friends are in the network, it's time to branch out and meet new people. Search for organisations with a similar mission as yours. See who their 'friends' are and invite them to your cause once you're up and running.

Get people's details

Once supporters of your cause have found you, make sure you encourage them to supply their email addresses so you can contact them later. It is important to save their details onto your database, but please remember to make sure you are complying with any data protection laws in your country.

Create an inviting page

Creating a fun and inviting online web presence can make people appreciate your cause more. They will spend more time looking at pages that look professional and welcoming. Remember that the presence you create online will represent your organisation to thousands, if not millions of people. It's important that it's been created well, providing all the information that your potential supporters may need.

Make time to keep it updated

Set aside a few minutes in the morning and a few minutes in the evening to update your page. As important as having a welcoming page is the content, so it is essential to allow time every day to update the page. If you have an opportunity to include something which will encourage people to come back day after day do so. Perhaps include updates of an animal's progress or changes in the organisation which will allow people to feel involved and interested.

Other Social Networking Sites from 'Wikipedia'

Friendster is a social networking site allowing users to share content including videos, photos, messages and comments with friends via their profile and their network. Friendster has over 90 million registered users and over 61 million visitors a month globally. In Asia, Friendster has more monthly unique visitors than any other social network. It is also the top social networking site in the Asia-Pacific region and one of the fastest growing social networks globally with over 150,000 new users registering each day. In Singapore and Malaysia, Friendster is larger than MySpace and Facebook. <http://www.friendster.com>

Hi5 is a social networking site allows users to create an online profile in order to show information such as interests, age and hometown and upload user pictures where users can post comments. Hi5 also allows the user to create personal photo albums and set up a music player in the profile. Users can also send friend requests via e-mail to other users. <http://www.hi5.com/>

LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking site used for professional networking. As of October 2008, it had more than 30 million registered users spanning 150 industries. <http://www.linkedin.com/>

Orkut is a social networking service designed to help users meet new friends and maintain existing relationships. Orkut is the most visited website in Brazil and second most visited site in India. You can also create and join a wide variety of online communities to discuss current events and ideas. <http://www.orkut.com/>

Sonico is social networking website oriented toward the Latin-American audience. Users can search and add friends, update their own personal profile, manage their privacy, upload photos and YouTube videos, organise events, interact with other people by means of private messages, public comments and photo tags. <http://www.sonico.com>