



Social Media and Fundraising Our Great Experiment

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SOCIAL MEDIA ARE CHANGING HOW we do everything: how we interact, how we think, how we buy. Social media are transforming our relationships, our businesses, our communities. So, naturally, they are altering the way we give.

As social media continue to change our world, nonprofits must do the hard but important work of adapting to these changes. For Choice USA, a national youth-led and youth-driven organization working on reproductive justice, the need for adaptation was clear. Globally, statistics show that Facebook has more than 500 million active users and Twitter has nearly

200 million users. As a youth organization, we know that nearly 100% of our audience spends most of their time on social networks. Organizationally, we concluded that we could no longer allow social media to be on the periphery of our work. We must discover creative and innovative ways to fully integrate social media into our communications, our programs and, of course, our fundraising.

During the past five years, Choice USA has begun to discover ways to integrate social media into everything we do. We began with our field work, at first engaging our members and

allies on Facebook and Twitter and later on YouTube. Next we used social media to enhance our communications, publicizing and popularizing our message through the various networks. Hiring communications and field staff well versed in social media, helped us learn that these tools were useful to enhance our face-to-face engagement with young people as well as our standing within the national sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice scene. Finding success with both our field

issued our save-the-date announcement, we first posted it on the homepage of our website, then sent out an e-blast to our list, with a reminder in our monthly newsletter. We duplicated this message on Facebook and Twitter. We chose not to create a Facebook event for the G2GC. Facebook events are very helpful in organizing events that are free, but not events that include ticket sales. Instead, we simply directed our Facebook fans and Twitter followers to our website event page. All in all, we have

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and communications social media work, we have moved to the daunting task of figuring out how social media can maximize our fundraising efforts.

Building Social Media Fans for Fundraising

Our Generation to Generation Celebration (G2GC) seemed like a natural place to start. This popular event, hosted every year in Washington, D.C., is meant to bring in individual donors. Sponsored by partner organizations and individuals, the event honors the reproductive justice achievements of young people and their mentors. Awards include the Steinem-Waters Legacy Award for Mentorship, the Excellence in Leadership Award, and the Outstanding Chapter Award. With about 150 people purchasing tickets for the G2GC, it gives us an opportunity to promote our work to a wide network and cultivate relationships with people in the D.C. area—our members, local supporters, and allies in the movement. The G2GC is always an inspiring party.

Although the event is not high-dollar, it has perpetually been a money-maker. Then, in 2009, as the economic crisis took a toll on many nonprofits, we struggled to get organizational sponsorship and our ticket sales lagged. We were just able to break even.

When we sat down to do our backwards plan for the G2GC the next year, we intentionally began to integrate social media as part of our larger strategy to scale up the event in terms of ticket sales, sponsorship, and notoriety. We saw social media as an inexpensive way to build visibility and buzz in order to boost our ticket sales. Along with being inexpensive, we also found that integrating social media into the G2GC did not significantly cut into our staff capacity—all told, it took about 2% of our communications director's time over the course of three months.

When the time for award nominations came around, we posted regular reminders on Facebook and Twitter. When we

found that limiting the number of times people need to click to give or buy gets the greatest return.

When it came time for ticket sales, we wanted to up the ante in terms of our social media advertising. So we announced a contest on Facebook. At the time, we had only 430 Facebook fans. Knowing we wanted to expand this number, we asked that our current fans invite their friends and told them that when we reached 1,000 fans we would do a drawing from our fan list for two VIP tickets to the G2GC. Within hours, we added two hundred fans. Over the course of a month, we reached our goal.



The contest's success was two-fold. In gaining more than 700 fans whom we could engage on future campaigns, events, and fundraisers, we built our list in a big way. At the same time, we were able to plug the G2GC many times in the month before the event. And when we announced the winner of the drawing, our ticket sales shot up. Even fans who did not win did not want to miss out on such a fun event.

The contest ended sooner than we anticipated. We never dreamed that we would be able to gain 700 fans in less than a month. To keep the momentum going, ChoiceTunes was born. Every year after the awards, the G2GC becomes a raucous dance party. So we asked our Facebook fans what they'd like on a playlist for the event. Dozens of fans commented on the post, and BitchMedia even pitched it to their fans. We then used playlist



.com to create a playlist that could be embedded on our website and sent the link in an e-blast and posted it on Facebook and Twitter as one of our final reminders about the G2GC.

In a final push, we offered our Facebook fans and Twitter followers an exclusive rate for tickets. In the end, we were able to turnout more than 125 people, a record number of attendees. By the day of our event, we had posted on Facebook and Twitter more than 20 times, sent out seven e-blasts and gave shout-outs in three newsletters. We also asked our partner organizations to push the event on their lists, which more than ten of them willingly did.

Pushing It Forward

We did not stop at turnout in our integration of social media and fundraising. Just before the event, we launched a new Facebook page both to complement our programming on comprehensive sex education and to engage a diverse audience via social media. The page was titled, “We bet we can find 100,000 people who were clueless on sex growing up!” In days, this page inspired hundreds of young people to share their stories about being clueless on sex and was covered widely within online media.

Acknowledging the sweeping success of the new Facebook page as well as our social media engagement leading up to G2GC, we decided to plug the page widely at the actual event. Television monitors throughout the room displayed a loop of photos intermixed with URLs for our Facebook, Twitter and “Clueless on Sex” page. Stories from the “Clueless on Sex” page were shared from the podium. People were encouraged to

become fans and we gained roughly 50 more fans immediately after the event. We even brought our Facebook contest winner on stage for a shout-out.

The Results

Using the G2GC to enhance our social media efforts and our social media efforts to enhance the G2GC was hugely successful. On the fundraising end, we had a record number of attendees and donations. On the social media end, our advertising and creative work around the G2GC gave us a new online momentum. The back-and-forth is exactly what social media are all about. Social media are social, after all. We cannot just use these platforms to get out our message and leave it at that. One-sided relationships cannot work in social media. Using social media to build a network of relationships and promoting an integrated strategy is key in turning a profit and raising visibility.

We know that this strategy may or may not work for everyone as it did for us, and we only dipped a toe into the deep pond of integrating social media into our fundraising efforts. With such a positive experience, we plan to delve even further this year, both in terms of event planning and soliciting individual donations. We are looking into Facebook apps like FundRazr to raise money for small projects. We want to incorporate YouTube videos from our members into our year-end appeal. And we are looking forward to expanding our social media efforts even more around the G2GC by hosting another contest and providing fun ways for those not in the Washington, D.C. area to give to the event.

A Great Experiment

With mobile giving on the rise, nonprofits have not yet discovered how to fully integrate social media into fundraising plans and, for some, the concept of social media integration is still controversial. Currently, only 3.5 percent of organizations have raised more than \$10,000 via social media campaigns, with the average amount only \$1,000. However, with most people spending a majority of their time online and the opportunities related to social media continuing to grow, Choice USA plans to do more. We are hopeful that it will be a great experiment that benefits our programs, our communications, and our development work. ■

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