

# Social Media for Nonprofits: The Definitive Guide

The world of social media marketing is a difficult one to navigate – even more now than it was before, thanks to COVID-19. As more people turn to social media for information and connection than ever before, nonprofits have an unprecedented opportunity to build their audience and come out the other side of this pandemic going strong.



It's true that social media is a competitive landscape, and that you'll be fighting to make sure your voice gets heard over both other nonprofits and for-profit businesses. It's true that some of these businesses might have a head start in their social media campaign. But it's also true that nonprofit social media is a unique opportunity to engage your supporters, share your story, and drive donations. And you don't need a huge marketing budget or a giant team of people to make social media a success for you.

**So, let's talk about what you need to do to make your social media marketing plan successful:**

- 1** Know the difference between for-profit and nonprofit social media.
- 2** Know your target audience – and which channels they're most likely to engage with.
- 3** Assess which platform will work best for you.
- 4** Know what your goals are for your campaigns and why you have them.
- 5** Create a consistent content strategy.
- 6** Measure your campaign outcomes, choosing the metrics relevant to your goals.



# 1: Know the difference between for-profit and nonprofit social media

It's easy to assume that all social media is the same, right? Everyone is trying to engage with potential clients, customers, or supporters. And ultimately, for-profit social media and nonprofit social media have the same goal: make money through that connection.

However, there's a fundamental difference in how for-profit businesses and nonprofits make that money. For-profit companies offer a product or service that customers can buy or use. Non-profits rely on donations for their specific issue or cause. One provides a tangible benefit that customers can immediately see, like getting a new TV or great lawn care. Non-profits, however, often must rely on an emotional connection with potential donors and results-driven posts and information to keep people invested in their message. Plus, for-profit businesses may have a bigger marketing budget available, depending on their size; nonprofits often have to rely more on organic growth.

At its core, social media for nonprofits needs to be built around connecting and engaging with potential followers and donors. A nonprofit social media strategy has to understand that trying to market to donors in the same way you'd market to consumers simply won't work. Understanding that vital difference will set the roadmap for your marketing strategy and inform who you target, why you target them, and what your goals for your campaigns are.

## 2: Know your target audience and which channels they're most likely to engage with

If you're a nonprofit that's been around for a while, you likely know who your key audience is – that is, who your main donors are, or who will resonate most with your mission. However, it's still good practice to understand your target audience and develop user personas to help create a base for your marketing campaigns.

But wait, I can hear you asking. What is a user persona? Simply put, a user persona is a fictitious representation of your ideal donor or supporter. It's a way to put a face to a bunch of impersonal data, like:



- Demographic information
- Age range
- Job status or employment type
- Pain points of your targeted supporters
- Desires of your targeted supporters
- And more

For example, one of the ASPCA's user personas might be an upper middle-class female in her late 30's-mid 40's who owns or fosters pets. She's donated before or has volunteered at an ASPCA. She follows a lot of animal groups on Facebook or animal accounts on Instagram. From this user persona, the ASPCA could develop a targeted blog post, Instagram image, or Facebook ad that appeals to this group – reaching their intended support base.

In contrast, a group like The Trevor Project would likely be reaching out to Millennials and Gen Z. Instead of soliciting cash donations, they'll target this particular group with opportunities to volunteer or support the cause, understanding that many of their most ardent supporters don't have a lot of extra cash to throw around (but understanding that the group will donate if they're passionate about something, or feel connected and engaged). They'll want to target people who have expressed an interest in activism, the LGBTQIA+ community, or volunteering.

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Two totally different groups, but with the same goal – building support for their cause, leading to donations, volunteers, or both.

It's vital to know who you're trying to talk to, for more reasons than ad targeting. As Raesa Waldon, the Digital Community Manager at Multiplying Good, says: "People will give to things and people they trust. It's important to know how to leverage peer to peer interactions and bring those in to support your organization's goals." In other words: how can you take the trust your target audience may have in, say, the president of your nonprofit and translate that into trust and engagement for your organization? Knowing how and where to target these potential supporters, and how and where you can create the strongest connection, will help you create a comprehensive social media plan.

### 3: Assess which platform will work best for you

Figuring out what your ideal audience is will also help you learn which platform – or platforms – are best for you to target. We understand that a lot of nonprofits, especially smaller ones, are working with a social media team of 1-3 people, and that sometimes they're doing double or even triple duty by handling social media in addition to their other jobs. That's why you need to be careful in where you expend your energy. If 80% of your audience spends most of their social media time on Facebook and only 10% is actively engaging on Twitter, it's smart to invest the bulk of your time in Facebook.

***Understanding where your supporters are most engaged and vocal is key.***

Understanding where your supporters are most engaged and vocal is key. After all, you can't build a community with your followers if your followers aren't interacting with you! While it's tempting to create an account on every platform available, an inactive account can be damaging to your reputation. Start with the two or three platforms you know your target audience uses and expand in the future if you have the time and resources to do so.

## 4: Know what your goals are for your campaigns and why you have them

Before you write your first post or create your first image, you should clearly define what your goals are for your social media campaign. It's one thing to say you want to "increase your follower count," but it's quite another to say that you want to increase your follower count in anticipation of a large donation event coming up, or that you want to increase your follower count to promote organic reach. It's important to outline what you want to do (increase likes, hit a specific number of shares, etc.) but it's also important to outline why you want to do it (reach new potential followers, gauge current engagement with posts, etc.).

Hubspot conducted a survey with over 9000 small- to medium-sized nonprofits, and the results were shocking: while nearly 80% of respondents considered social media moderately to very valuable and nearly 100% are on Facebook as their primary platform, nearly 70% have no strategies, policies, or documented goals for their social media campaigns. Over half aren't measuring their social media outcomes, and 81% aren't tracking the social media accounts of donors or volunteers.

What does this mean for you? It means that developing a strong outline of your goals can put you ahead of the curve when it comes to social media for nonprofits. Whether you want to increase brand recognition, educate your followers about your organization's cause, recognize your major donors, or even recruit employees, outlining the what and why of your social media campaign gives you a way to assess its success and understand how well you're reaching your goals.





## 5: Create a consistent content strategy

Raesa had this to say about content for a nonprofit organization's social media: "Repetition and consistency is key. If you want your audience to grow, you have to talk to them and know what's working and connecting. People are looking to be with their people – they will link to you and connect to you based on what they like and what they're passionate about."

And she's right – the best way to build an audience organically is to create consistent, repetitive content. When we say repetition, we don't mean posting the same thing over and over. Instead, repetition in social media means staying true to your core branding and values, no matter what type of content you're posting. Going live on Facebook? Great! Make sure the people who are live represent your organization's core mission and values. Writing a blog about your latest project? Fantastic! Make sure it vibes with the content you've already put out and continues that connection with your supporters. Looking to connect with your supporters on topics they care about? Wonderful! Consider investing in a marketing analytics tool that uncovers the topics they care about most that you don't currently cover.

The most important thing to remember is that your supporters are looking to connect. They're looking for a cause that resonates with their values, that ignites their passions, that stirs them to act. They want to feel the human in your business, and to know that there's someone on the other side hearing them. Respond to people who comment on your posts; create engaging content that people want to share. Remember that your social media can be a place where people feel empowered to act, and that can boost your audience retention, your follower count, and your engagement.



## 6: Measure your campaign outcomes by choosing the metrics relevant to your goals

Measuring your campaign outcomes is vital if you want to make social media the powerhouse for your nonprofit. Without a standard to compare your results to, you'll have no idea if you succeeded or failed, and you won't be able to replicate or improve upon results in your next campaign.

Followers, likes, and shares are all good metrics to keep an eye on, but there are other important metrics – like engagement, consumer sentiment, and conversions – that often get overlooked. As a nonprofit, engagement is key. You rely much more on supporters who feel that they're truly a part of your family and that you're working together for a cause, than a for-profit industry might. And positive engagement leads to positive brand recognition and positive public sentiment, which are both important for driving organic reach and growth.

On the flip side, if something goes wrong with a campaign, it's important not to get bogged down in the negativity. Do what Raesa calls "failing forward": understand that, especially right now, it's okay to make a mistake. It's okay to not succeed in the way you were envisioning, because the way people engage with businesses and social media in general is transforming at a rapid pace. Put a positive spin on what happened, have a plan in place to respond to any negativity, and understand that your metric measurement has helped you to avoid having the same problem twice.

### In Conclusion:

Social media is both an art and a science. Having a clear goal, a solid and consistent content strategy, and established metric measurement is super useful! But there's more to social media marketing than the numbers. Following these tips can help boost your brand awareness, retention, and engagement, sure, but it's also important to have fun with your social media. Learn what makes your community really tick; find out what gives them joy and gets them talking.

Social media for nonprofits is a long-term game. You're not going to become the biggest organization on Facebook overnight, and you shouldn't worry about doing so. But with consistency, compassion, and a comprehensive toolkit, you can build a successful platform to spread your message, engage with your supporters, encourage donations, and reach out to those you think will like what you have to say.