

Developing a Social Media Strategy

Think POST

When developing a social media strategy for your organization, think P.O.S.T. This means starting with thinking about People first and Technology last because social media isn't just about technology, it's about relationships.

1. **People:** Who is your audience and how do they use social media?
2. **Objectives:** What are you hoping to accomplish in reaching out to this audience? What sorts of interactions do you want to have with that audience (listening, talking, energizing, supporting, embracing)?
3. **Strategies:** How do you want the interactions you've decided to have with your audience to change the way your audience sees you and engages with you/your organization?
4. **Technology:** Based on everything you mapped out in the previous steps, determine which social media technology you're going to use (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.).

People First

In order to develop an effective social media strategy you have to know who you are trying to reach. Start by thinking about your **target audience**, the people that can benefit from the work and messages of your organization. Some examples include -



- Professionals: caseworkers, foster parents, judges, lawyers, teachers, and service providers
- Policy Makers: state legislators, congressional members, local elected officials
- Volunteers: coaches, Court Appointed Special Advocates, mentors
- Community Members: Youth and adults in the community, advocates, systems involved youth, parents of systems involved youth

Once you know who your target audience is you will have to conduct research to find out more about them, including where they go for their information and what social media tools they are

currently using. For example, if your target audience includes parents of system involved youth and you find out that a lot of them trust information from a blog about parenting, be sure to visit that blog and post comments there that raise awareness about the work your organization is doing to support parents.

Objectives

After you determine your target audience(s) you have to decide what you are aiming to accomplish by communicating with them. Based on what you want to accomplish, you're going to want to **interact with your target audience in specific ways**. Examples of ways to interact include:

1. Listening - enter social media spaces and listen to what people are saying, this allows you to better understand your audience and what their wants and needs are
2. Talking - communicate with your audience by sharing content and spreading messages
3. Energizing - empower influential and enthusiastic members of your target audience that are using social media and have the same values of your organization
4. Supporting - set up spaces and tools to allow members of your target audience that are already using social media to support each other (rather than just receiving support from your organization)
5. Embracing - use social media to identify champions in the community and bring them into the work your organization does in the community



For example, if you want to create a space where systems involved youth can get support from each other, you might want to consider creating a closed Facebook group that is for systems involved youth only and is private. In this space, youth that are in foster care, receiving mental health services, or involved in the juvenile justice system can communicate with each other and get support from each other.

Pick Your Strategy

After you have determined your audience and your objective(s), you need to **plan for how your communication on social media sites will accomplish your end goal**. Think about both your long-term end goal, and short-term goals to plan how you are going to engage your audience to achieve those goals.

- Create a plan that starts small but has room to grow
- Think through the implications of your plan

- Map out sample scenarios that might come up as a result of your engagement with your target audience on social media and then come up with a plan for how to handle them
- Get buy-in from key supporters and stakeholders
 - Hold an informational meeting with the people who will be affected by your presence on social media and go over the risks and benefits
 - Be honest about the risks but come up with ways that you are going to address them
- Put someone in charge of managing your social media presence, preferably someone who has experience using social media
 - Recruit other people to help you monitor your social media presence daily
- Develop social media user guidelines and policies for your organization (if you plan on engaging with youth, this is particularly important)
 - Hold informational sessions for youth and families that teach them about social media and how to stay safe and have fun while using it
- Develop a crisis plan in case a member of your target audience posts something that needs to be responded to immediately

Last, but not least, Technology!

Once you have determined your audience, objective, and strategy you are ready to think about what technology to use. When selecting the technology remember that social media isn't about technology it's about relationships.



- When selecting what technology to use think about how it enables your organization to have a relationship with stakeholders and community members.

- Select a technology that enables community members to not only engage with your organization but also with each other.

- Family members and youth often want to connect with each other so they can offer support and advice through their shared life experience.

- Select the technology based on your target audience and their use of social media.



For example, if you're aiming to reach behavioral health professionals in your community, consider setting up a LinkedIn group or company page for your organization because professionals use LinkedIn at higher rates than Facebook.



Develop Your Social Media Strategy

PEOPLE

Who is your target audience? Examples could include your Board, Latino youth between the ages of 18-24, family members that have a child receiving behavioral health services. Be specific!

Do the audiences you've selected use social media? If so, how (this might require some research)?

OBJECTIVES

What are your long term goals? What are your short term goals? Based on these goals how do you want to interact with your target audience? For example, if you want a way to let youth in the community know about an upcoming youth conference you'll be "talking." List your goals below and identify which of the five objectives to use to reach that goal: listening, talking, energizing, supporting, embracing. Remember that sometimes you have to start small and just listen.

STRATEGIES

Envision how you want your organization's relationship with your target audience to change. For example, how will your relationship with community members or local service providers be different or better based on your organization's use of social media? Will parents of systems involved youth use your organization as a way to find other parents that can support them emotionally? Will local service providers find information about your organization on LinkedIn and then get in touch with you to learn more about what you do? These are just some examples to consider.

TECHNOLOGY

Based on your target audience, goals and objectives, and initial plan start brainstorming what technologies you might want to use. Re-list your target audience here and then match them with a social media platform. Examples of some social media platforms include: Facebook page, Facebook group, Twitter, LinkedIn group, LinkedIn company page, YouTube channel, Blog, Wiki, etc.

Bringing It All Together

Based on the goals and objectives you listed above, begin to develop an action plan.

Who will be in charge of social media in your organization?

What is your timeline for developing user guidelines and social media policies for your organization?

What organization staff, stakeholders and/or community members do you need to pull in to an informational meeting to get their support for developing a social media presence?

What is your timeline for developing a crisis plan?

List some of the actions you need to take in order to put your social media strategy in motion.

References:

1. Li C, Bernoff J. Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies. Forrester Research, Inc.; 2008.

