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# The Modern Networking Tool

*Why You Should Use Social Media for Advocacy Work*



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Before the 2020 pandemic, social media was generally used as a way for families and friends to stay up-to-date on each other's lives. It was a way to share pictures and life updates, ask questions about the local community and sometimes find useful products. For nonprofits and businesses, social media was a great way to connect with a customer or client either to increase education, ask for donations or sell a product. Although social media was an important tool for many people, it wasn't anything close to a necessary part of life.

Then came the pandemic and lock downs. Unable to leave the house or properly interact with family, friends and the community, most people turned to the internet, and more importantly, to social media to find connection and news. Since the pandemic started, social media use has gone up dramatically.

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More people are joining community groups and following more local pages as a way to help support local organizations, and learn more about current events, especially with the renewed interest in racial equity issues. This means that in the last few months, social media has become an important networking tool for businesses and nonprofits.

Like every tool that's misused or misunderstood, social media gets a bad rap for being a time waster, and it is often overlooked by the older generation. But social media is one of the most powerful tools any advocate or professional has at their fingertips right now.

Think of social media as a community group text. Whenever you make a post or a comment it can be seen by thousands of people in minutes. You get real-time feedback, reactions, comments and thoughts. And you get an opportunity to have conversations with community members you may have never seen before. All of this means social media is a powerful networking tool.

Think about your circle of influence. Your friends and family probably already know you are part of the Community Action network. Perhaps your neighbors, local leaders and fellow church-goers are also aware you work for an organization called Community Action though they may not know entirely what Community Action does. And you may have some professional contacts outside of the network that also know what you do. All in all, most of us have a circle of influence about 30 people large. Not bad. But what would happen if you took that influence to a community Facebook Group?

I'll use an example from my own experience. I have joined a few different local community pages. They have titles like Raleigh Info and Raleigh Community Information. They are each a few thousand members strong. When the pandemic first came to the USA, we created and released a small infographic about washing your hands and sanitizing your home. We shared it to our organization's page and got a few likes and about 30 people saw it, which is pretty average for us. I then shared that post to two of the community pages I'm a part of and wrote a small message about how this was great



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information and if anyone needed help here's the website. That post was seen by 3,000 people. It had over a dozen likes on one group, and several new people liked our Facebook page the same day I shared that post. We reached far more people with that simple share than we ever could have alone. With that post I increased my own sphere of influence to thousands instead of a dozen. You have the same ability.

You may not use social media often, but you don't need to be an expert to have the same level of influence. Now, more than ever, we should be connecting with our communities and educating them about our agencies. Social media is our ticket to reaching more people in need, soliciting more donations, educating more people, and building more awareness

around the issues we advocate for. And it only takes a few minutes of your time. Instead of seeing social media as an entertainment platform, let's think of it as a networking opportunity unlike any other available. Let's start using it with purpose. Let's start taking advantage of the chance to exponentially grow our advocacy work and outreach.

So here's your challenge. If you don't already have a Facebook account, go ahead and make yourself one. Then find at least one community Facebook group. Rural communities are particularly apt to use community groups, so there will be at least one either for your county or your city. Just use the search bar to search for "[your city name] information" and see what comes up. Once you've found and joined a group, scroll through the posts: see what people are talking about, asking about and thinking about. And then, make your move. I would recommend you make a post about your agency once a week. That can be sharing a success story and asking for donations so you can help more community members. That can be sharing a post from your agency or state association and commenting on the great work we do. That can be just sharing what you do and asking people to volunteer or like your page. Whatever you feel like posting, make sure it has a call to action. One post a week will take you about five minutes to create, and in return you'll reach hundreds, even thousands of people. Talk about an incredible return on your time invested!

