Constituent Engagement: 3 Tips for Bonding with Volunteers Through Tech

by Fonda Kendrick | February 14, 2013

Why do volunteers and donors trust your organization? Not sure? It's probably time you stop and ponder this question. We all know that trust is built when we follow through on what others expect of us. This is certainly true in personal relationships, but it also plays a large part in other arenas as well, particularly in the nonprofit sector.

An obvious example, of course, is that donors count on agencies to be good stewards of their monetary gifts. There is another dimension that we may be less cognizant of, however: just as prospective or new supporters want to see that you are putting their money to good use, they also trust that you are being a good steward of their volunteer hours. So how can your organization build trust with volunteers? Here are three tips every nonprofit should know:

Tip #1: Engage via Social Media

In this very digital age, we know that supporters are often bombarded with email and messages from social media. (Cell phones are constantly buzzing and dinging with notifications!) But we also know that social media is a good tool for keeping your agency front and center in volunteers' and donors' awareness. To balance this, do your Facebook fans a favor and target your posts in meaningful ways that engage your community. It will demonstrate that you respect your fans' time and make them more likely to read your social media communications.

How do you accomplish that? The first step is to outline a **carefully crafted social media plan**. A recent blog on Socialbrite.org, a site with great social media information for nonprofits, has some effective tips for doing so. One of the most important points the article makes is to find ways to keep your Facebook followers interested. Consider these questions raised by Socialbrite:

- What different ways can you create value (and meaning) for your supporters?

- How can you ensure that your fans feel it is worth their time to read your posts?

- Is the message compelling enough for them to reply, like, or share the message?

Try providing a tidbit that will enrich their lives in some way. For example, this could be a practical tip or news story that ties in with your mission. Socialbrite also suggests posting "fresh" information on Facebook that is not found on your blog or website, which again adds value to the post.

Tip #2: Focus on Quality over Quantity

How much you post, however, is as important as what you post, according to a study by marketing company Buddy Media. Its statistical analysis of Facebook posts of almost 100 of the world's

biggest retailers led them to some best-practices recommendations. Here are a couple findings that seemed to be especially important to note:

- **Be brief**. Posts with 80 characters or less are much more likely to be read.

- <u>**Don't**</u> **feel the need to post multiple times a day**. The Buddy Media report finds that companies "who posted 3 or more times in a day had 25% lower like rates and 42% lower comment rates – overall having a 29% decrease in engagement."

Socialbrite adds that agencies do not even need to post daily. In fact, just a couple times per week is sufficient, as long as posts are on a consistent basis. Again, it's about being aware of time. If posts are too lengthy, or if there are too many, your fans will tend to feel it's not productive to wade through them and instead skip over what you have to say.

Tip #3: Plan Your Organization's "In-Site" Optimization Strategy

We've concentrated most of our article on Facebook tips, but it would be remiss not to mention your website in this context as well. After all, the goal with many social campaigns is to deliver calls to action that often lead to your website. Another way to take your supporters' time into consideration is to have a well designed website that is easy to navigate. This means it prominently features your organization's mission and makes it as easy as possible for your supporters to respond to calls to action. If you aren't already doing so, consider incorporating into your site a clear path to online donations and online volunteer promotion and registration.

"After working in the development and volunteer space for many years, a common complaint I often hear is that organizations are not attaining desired conversions in these areas. More often than not, I've found one thing in common: opportunities for someone to donate or register for a volunteer opportunity are buried more than three clicks deep", adds <u>Corbit Harrison</u>, Vice President of Business Development for VolunteerHub. Making these calls-to-action clear and easy to navigate demonstrates that you not only respect the time of your supporters, but that you are also trying to make the best use of your organization's time as well.

Building trust digitally can be challenging, but simply being respectful of your audience's time can go a long way toward achieving that goal. Providing information that is useful, accurate, and disseminated in a reasonable manner will certainly help create that connection.

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