

FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN, AND TWITTER

Social Media for Networking in Communities

BACKGROUND

Over the past 15 years, Internet use has exploded. As people seek to interact in new digital spaces, social media outlets are growing to meet that need. More than 250 social media platforms have debuted, drawing over 1 billion people worldwide to try these networks. They have become a place where people create, share, and exchange information and ideas. In this information sheet we answer the questions:

- Why should community leaders use social media for networking?
- What do Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter offer community leaders using them to network?

WHY USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NETWORKING?

Social media offers unique advantages to meet new people and build community. The use of social media:

- Allows leaders to find people where they are already spending time - Facebook has over 500 million daily users, LinkedIn has 225 million accounts, and 200 million people regularly use Twitter.
- Finds connections intelligently - Social media sites frequently provide search functionality that allows users to focus on people sharing similar locales, interests, and fields of work or volunteerism. Furthermore, profiles give additional information to provide a fuller picture of a person.
- Eases the connection process - These sites are designed to bring people together and facilitate introductions and opportunities for interaction. Through introductions, common links, and open-policies about contact, they can make taking the first step simpler.
- Engages and mobilizes networks - When communities have been formed, social media networks provide streamlined ways to communicate with large groups of people inside a network to take action and bring about change.

HOW CAN FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN, AND TWITTER MAKE NETWORKING MORE EFFECTIVE?

Facebook

Facebook, compared to other social media networks, is a fairly casual site for interacting where content can range widely. One is as likely to see political views shared as often as pictures of children or pets. Users have the opportunity to create a profile that includes information such as location, work, education, and photos, as well as favorite music, movies, TV shows, and products or brands. Users connect with other friends to share this information or join groups of others with similar interests. So how might community leaders like you use Facebook to network with people they don't know?

- Look at your friends' list of friends and consider who could be a beneficial add to your network. View their profiles to see interests, hobbies, and groups that can be key indicators of what they value.
- Use the groups feature to see who is involved and where. You can find groups on Facebook through user profiles or by using the search prompt. Results from the search prompt will often need to be filtered by the "groups" category in the left tool bar of the results page. Helpful searches include hobbies, locations, or interests.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn takes the profiles and connections of Facebook and applies them to the working world. LinkedIn has made its name as a place where professionals can connect, learn about, and interact with other professionals. Thus, profiles focus on work experience, educational history, skills and expertise, professional associations, and certifications. What does LinkedIn offer to hopeful networkers?

- A powerful advanced search – Users can search for profiles using criteria such as location, title, employer, school, industry, and relationship to the searcher. These searches yield high amounts of information that can save time and effort scanning multiple profile pages to find the right person to engage.
- A clear way to separate professional and personal life – LinkedIn provides users a place to keep their professional networking completely separate from personal connections and interactions.

Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging service where users post their thoughts in messages ("tweets") of 140 characters or less. Users follow accounts they are interested in, rendering friend or connection requests unnecessary, to see what others post. Twitter has become the preferred location for getting immediate updates on news, weather, and information of all kinds. How does Twitter facilitate networking?

- It provides an easy way to track and participate in conversations. Hashtags, which categorize posts, give users a way to quickly find the tweets that are relevant to them. Twitter places no restrictions on who can reply to whom and posts are public by default, so the barriers to joining a conversation are nonexistent.
- Users can see all the followers of an account, as well as lists curated by accounts. This feature gives hopeful networkers a range of possible connections that can be directly communicated with via Twitter.

SUMMARY

Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter offer many benefits to community leaders looking to expand their networks and build relationships. They open doors to new connections, provide fuller pictures of individuals, and can make introductions easier.

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