



STATE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Expanding your reach

Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools bring new advocacy opportunities but also new challenges.

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Feeling overwhelmed at the prospect of adding Facebook, Twitter, blogging and other social media tools to your advocacy campaigns? You can't afford to be if you want to get your message out, said speakers at the 2010 State Leadership Conference, held March 6–9 in Washington, D.C.

"Issues are being discussed and people are being mobilized, regardless of whether you're there or not," warned Alan Rosenblatt, PhD, associate director for online advocacy at the Center for American Progress Action Fund. "Either you're part of the conversation or you're not. If not, you get what's handed to you."

Psychologists have varying levels of expertise when it comes to social media, said Teresa Bruce, chair-elect of the Council of Executives of State and Provincial Psychological Associations. "They range from e-mail users to people out there Twittering even as we speak," said Bruce, who organized a plenary session on social media.

No matter how experienced you are, consider these tips when conducting advocacy campaigns via social media:

- **Keep in mind that your audience chooses how it engages with you.** In traditional advocacy, producers of content controlled how that content was distributed. Today, said Rosenblatt, people may opt to receive your content via e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, text messaging or even postal mail. If you transmit your message via only one of these vehicles, you risk missing part of your potential audience. Even an e-mail address isn't necessarily enough. "It may just be a bucket for their spam," he said. In addition, by sending messages via the wrong channel, you risk alienating recipients.
- **Build relationships.** Most successful outreach is based on relationships, said Colin Delaney, founder and chief editor of Epolitics.com. "If a stranger comes up to you and gives you information, how do you respond?" he asked. "If a friend gives you information, you're more likely to listen." To spread your information effectively, you must become a trusted voice and build a "web of relationships."
- **Take advantage of social media's capabilities.** "Pushing information out there" should be just the beginning of your social media campaign, said Rosenblatt. The next step is interacting with your audience, using such tools as capwiz.com, thesoftedge.com or DemocracyInAction to ask readers to provide e-mail addresses, make donations or send letters to Congress. In the best case, the conversation expands beyond you and your audience so that audience members are now talking to each other. They may even get together offline, a process facilitated by such sites as meetup.com. And remember that it's not just about text: You can also share photos via Flickr or videos via YouTube.
- **Influence the influencers.** Traditionally, advocates have reached out to such key "influencers" as the press, policymakers and donors. "But we now live in a world where these tools are available to everybody," said Rosenblatt. "Ordinary citizens have become incredibly influential." An individual blogger or Twitter user with a large following can help spread your message far beyond your own networks, he said, suggesting that advocates cultivate reciprocal relationships with such individuals by regularly providing them with good content. You can find out what people are talking about by doing searches on Google, Technorati and Twitter.
- **Integrate your social media strategies.** It's a big mistake to think of social media in isolation from the rest of your communications, said Delaney. "It works best when everything is integrated together," he said. Delaney recommends three elements: a Web site, blog or social media profile page that can serve as a hub where people can find you; e-mail or some other way to stay in touch; and online outreach — going out in public by blogging, posting on other people's blogs, participating in e-mail discussion lists and the like. These elements are mutually reinforcing, he said. You might write a blog post, others pick it up and then readers head to your Web site to join

your e-mail list. "You're looking for a ripple effect," he said.

- **Be ethical.** APA's Ethics Code applies online as well as off, said David J. Palmiter Jr., PhD, public education coordinator for the Pennsylvania Psychological Association. Social media don'ts include paying a blogger to promote your new book, soliciting client testimonials, diagnosing someone based on exchanges via Facebook and offering webinars based on untested approaches to treatment. Palmiter also recommended that psychologists include a statement about social media in the paperwork they give new clients. The statement could state that you have a presence on social media sites, that you don't accept invitations from clients and that clients do best when their relationship with a psychologist doesn't extend beyond the office, said Palmiter.

Most important, said Delaney, don't let the burgeoning number of technologies obscure the fact that social media are just a new way of doing what you're already doing.

"Just about everything we do online is an extension or re-imagining of things we've been doing offline for a long time," he said.

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