

10 ONLINE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS



PPT 11 - 12
ONLINE
COMMUNICATION
CHANNELS AND TOOLS



TOOLKIT
SPREAD THE
WORD

Love it or loathe it, social media is here to stay and should form an essential component of any N2000 site communication strategy. Despite the apparent simplicity and accessibility of most social media channels, using them wisely and effectively can provide excellent opportunities to connect with many existing and new stakeholders and supporters for your N2000 site. Social media however can also bring challenges and like any communication tool its use requires careful planning.

10.1 SOCIAL MEDIA FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND NEWSLETTERS⁷

Why going viral? Why connecting online? Why use online networking?

In the past several years, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of online and other electronic tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and texting) for sharing and creating content, which in this document are collectively called social media. Companies, government agencies and protected areas are discovering how to harness the power of social media to expand the reach of their marketing and communication messages

For those of us in the nature protection communication, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging allow us to expand our reach, foster engagement, and increase access to credible, nature - based messages. Social media can help organizations achieve the after goals.

Disseminate information in a timelier manner:

- Increase the potential impact of important messages.
- Leverage networks of people to make information sharing easier.
- Create different messages to reach diverse audiences.
- Personalize health messages and target them to a particular audience.
- Engage with the public.
- Empower people to make safer and healthier decisions.

⁷ Based on the website <http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/GuidetoWritingforSocialMedia.pdf>

When integrated into communication campaigns and activities, social media can encourage participation, conversation, and community—all of which can help spread key messages, influence decision making, and promote behaviour change. Social media also helps to reach people when, where, and how it is convenient for them, which improves the availability of content and might influence satisfaction and trust in the health messages delivered.

Social media is also a key tool in building awareness and credibility. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project report in 2011, “Social Networking Sites and Our Lives,” nearly half of adults (47%) used at least one social networking site in 2010. That number is growing quickly, nearly doubling from 2008 (26%). Social networks are places where people gather information from experts and peers to help them make decisions.

10.2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Keep in mind that social media is one tool in a larger communication strategy. Always consider your overarching communication goals when developing social media activities.

As with all media outreach, the keys to an effective social media presence are to

- Identify your target audience.
- Determine your objective.
- Select the appropriate channel for your message.
- Decide upfront how much time and effort you can invest.

Target Audiences, Literacy and Plain Language, and Social Marketing

Social media presents a particular challenge for communicators because the users don't focus on a single document. A reader often sifts through an onslaught of information, skims topics, and browses sites to determine where to focus his or her attention. If content is dense, long, and jargon-filled, the reader probably won't find it appealing. To ensure that the reader does take the time to read your messages, social media writers should:

- Understand the audience they are trying to reach.
- Apply literacy principles.
- Follow plain language best practices.
- Use social marketing concepts to improve communications

Know Your Target Audience(s)

One benefit of using social media is audience segmentation. You can develop messages that are specific to the concerns, needs, and desires of a

particular demographic. Understanding what is important to your audience will increase the effectiveness of your social media efforts.

The Importance of Plain Language

Using plain language helps to correct these problems. Studies show that when writers use plain language, readers discover information more quickly, understand

it better, and find it more compelling. When you think plain language, think everyday language, and you will help your readers.

Tools of Social Marketing in Communications

Social marketing is the use of marketing principles to influence human behaviour to improve health or benefit

Society. **Social marketing is about identifying the specific target audience segment(s), describing the benefits, and creating interventions that will influence or support the desired behaviour change.**

Social marketing **planning requires understanding and incorporating the "The Four Ps of Marketing"** (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) into program planning. Social marketing looks at providing health services from the viewpoint of the consumer. Research can help to describe what an audience is now doing or

thinking, which will help shape realistic goals for behaviour change.

Below are some guidelines for incorporating social marketing into your communications.

- Highlight the positive aspects of your message.
- Answer the audience's question, "What's in it for me?"
- Respect your audience.
- Encourage your readers to take a particular action or to learn more.
- Tie messages to specific products or services when possible (such as "Find out where to get tested" or "Know your status").

10.3 PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA WRITING - CREATING CONTENT

Social media content should be:

- Relevant, useful, and interesting
- Easy to understand and share
- Friendly, conversational, and engaging
- Action-oriented

Social media is most effective when the content relates to a particular interest or desire of a specific group of people. Because your target audience can receive multiple messages from multiple sources every day, try to make your messages relevant, useful, and interesting so your audience will interact and be engaged.

Easy to understand and share

In social media channels, your message competes fiercely with others for your readers' attention. That is

why it's important to use plain language and craft your message so the information you present is easy to

understand. Also, consider how easy your message is to share or “like” on Facebook or “retweet” on Twitter. If users must modify your message to share

it, they might get frustrated and quit or change the message so it’s not as accurate as the original.

Action-Oriented

You can use social media tools to help build awareness and direct readers to take action or find more information. Social media messages should have a call to action, urging people to take the next step.

- News articles
- Fact sheets
- FAQs
- Outbreak notices
- Research reports
- Event or conference content
- Guidelines

Use Your Web Content as Source Material for Social Media Content

Writing for social media can be a demanding task. One way to cope is to tweet, post, and text about Web content you have already created. Make Social Media Writing Easier by Repurposing Web Content.

Any kind of Web content can provide the source material for a tweet, Facebook post, or text message, including:

Repurposing Web content for social media communication is efficient, because this content has been developed, edited, and cleared through the appropriate channels. Use social media to promote Web content or start a conversation with community members who have joined your social media channels.

10.4 MEDIA WRITING CHECK LIST



Length: Posts can be up to 250 characters (including spaces).

Access to more information: Hyperlink to a Web page, photo, or video. Include information available through other social media channels: a short code for texts; a hashtag for Twitter.

Call to action: Invite followers to do something such as watch a video, attend an event, or use CDC resources.

Tone: Write in a friendly, casual style. Avoid jargon.

Tagging: Use the @ symbol in front of a public health partner’s name in your post to automatically create a link and display the post on the partner’s page.

Abbreviations: Avoid abbreviations, but if they are necessary, use sparingly and only if easily understood.

Length: Tweets should be 120 characters or less, including a shortened URL. **Access to more information:** Include a hyperlink to a website, an @ mention, or a hashtag #.

Call to action: Start the tweet with a verb if possible: Use watch, read, learn, etc.

Tone: Write in friendly, action-oriented style.

Mentions: Use the “@” symbol in front of a public health partner’s name in your post to automatically create a link and display the post on the partner’s profile.

Abbreviations: Avoid abbreviations, but if they are necessary, use them only if they are easily understood, do not change the meaning of the tweet, and are not immature or unprofessional.

10.5 DIRECT MAILING AND NEWSLETTERS

Email is the most cost-effective and highest ROI (return on investment) communication (marketing) medium.

However, take care not to consider email low value just because it is cheap. Failing to take care with your email marketing strategy will be detrimental to your relationship with your audience. Put the same care, effort and focus on your email as if it was a costly direct mail.

Email provides excellent measurability. No longer do you need to guess how people will react to your marketing messages. With email, you can measure who opens and clicks on your email. This not only means you know who in your audience is engaged but also what information is interesting and of value to them. The measurability gives the data necessary to allow optimisation and improvement in your marketing. You can test different messages and improve marketing based on facts. This means no more meeting room arguments as to what might be better - you can do it, test it and find out what works best.

Choosing content for newsletters

Your content is what will keep your customers reading your email. After they sign up, they will read your next two or three emails. If they like the content they will continue reading, but if they do not they will unsubscribe or emotionally unsubscribe. Emotional unsubscribing is when someone will not bother to actually unsubscribe but will continue to receive your newsletter and will simply hit delete without even skimming it

In your content do not talk about yourself and how good your company and products are. Today's readers are skeptics. The most effective newsletters deliver information of interest and value to the reader without being full of marketing and sales speak. If you provide thoughtful, helpful and insightful information that is of value to your readers on its own, then you will build your relationship and trust so that they will become interested in your products, services and spending money with you.

Social Media vs. Newsletters

Social media websites such as LinkedIn, Plaxo, YouTube, Google Plus and Facebook rely primarily on user-contributed content. Newsletters, whether they are sent by email or postal mail, consist entirely of editor-supplied content. For the small business, this is the difference between using a rifle or a shotgun. The target market in social media can range over hundreds of thousands or even millions of individuals, many of whom may have little or no interest in your business model. Conversely, the newsletter intends to reach a far smaller, yet much more motivated, group of consumers, customers or clients. When properly developed, each approach can be effective in building customer base and brand loyalty. When the two are combined, the total effectiveness is noticeably greater than the sum of the two parts.



10.6 OTHER ONLINE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Websites

With millions of internet users across the globe, accessing the web from their computers, phones, and tablets, it is no surprise that the website should be the cornerstone of the race communication plan. It is the strongest marketing tool and often the first place participants go to get information.

For more tips and tricks on how to create, promote and maintain good websites, please see the toolkit.



Blogs

Often referred to as social media, blogs exist on every topic imaginable, and in every industry. Blogs are web logs that are updated on a regular basis by their author. They can contain information related to a specific topic. Blogs give an opportunity to write content that is unique to you and your “practice”. While some people are uncomfortable with self-promotion, blog gives you an occasion to interact with your visitors while promoting who you are and what you do. Today blogs are being used for all sorts of purposes. From companies that use blogs to communicate and interact with customers and other stakeholders to newspapers that incorporate blogs to their main website to offer a new channel for their writers. Individuals also created blogs to share with the world their expertise on specific topics.

There are numerous reasons why it makes sense to blog and communicate about N2000 sites and nature in general:

- Establishing expertise.
- Establishing “real” credibility.
- Building a professional community.
- Creating relationships with stakeholders.
- Drive targeted traffic to your main web site.