

Abrams
Research



**Social Media
Guide for
Trade and
Labor Unions**





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Introduction

As social media becomes the dominant venue for online information exchange, the formal websites, press releases and other means of communication long favored by trade and labor unions will be seen by fewer and fewer people. Where users were captive audiences to TV, magazines, traditional mailers and even website banner ads, now the highest-quality messaging will be less effective if viewers don't seek it out on their own.

Every day there are:

- More than 45 million status updates on Facebook
- More than 23 million "tweets"
- More than 1 billion views on YouTube
- More than 900,000 new blog posts

Unions can use the raw power of social media networks to tackle these challenges and solidify the principles on which their foundation is built—advocacy and community. Social media, which fosters direct communication, constant dialogue and critique among users, is an effective tool for establishing accountability between organizations and the public. Using social-media tools, unions can create a virtual 'face' for their organizations. When used to disseminate information about operating policies, initiatives and progress, social media helps to establish executive transparency. When used to connect and promote dialogue with the public, social media tools can help to galvanize your community and develop trusting relationships.

Social media tools have many advantages over traditional media that union organizations need to understand in order to use them to their fullest:

- Audience segments can be easily identified and reached through social media
- Communities are pre-established on credible social media platforms
- Messaging can be tailored to achieve fundamental goals while still gaining acceptance from online communities
- Transmission of messages through these channels is more cost effective and often simpler than traditional marketing methods.



Developing an effective social media program that fits your union requires a number of steps

1 Researching

- How these channels work
- Where your audiences are in online spaces
- How messages get passed around in these groups
- What conversations are going on, where they're taking place, and who is doing the talking
- Who the thought leaders are on this topic
- Which groups are amenable to targeted marketing

2 Developing

- Websites, blogs, Twitter accounts
- A voice and content strategy for these platforms

3 Executing

- Monitoring and interacting with users on these platforms
- Publishing content
- Answering questions/conversing with the audience

The Players

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Blogs</p> | <p>From the late-90's rise of <i>The Drudge Report</i> until the late 2000's, blogs served an intermediary role as the "media's media," discovering and popularizing real-world stories underreported by traditional news outlets. Increasingly, however, blogs are able to distribute information independently of mainstream outlets. In many cases, events in the blogosphere have <i>themselves</i> become the story.</p> |
| <p>Forums and Message Boards</p> | <p>Forums and message boards are discussion sites, that allow users to join, typically without requiring any application or qualification process. Users may create personal profiles, start pages dedicated to conversation on a specific subject, and participate in pre-existing conversations.</p> |
| <p>Twitter</p> | <p>Twitter functions by allowing users to "broadcast" short messages of 140 characters or less. Most messages, or "tweets," are available to the public – however, users typically only view the messages of people whose Twitter feeds they have subscribed to.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Facebook, LinkedIn, Social Directories</p> | <p>Facebook presents a particularly important opportunity for unions through its ability to incorporate applications. Applications are tools that allow users to “opt-in” to certain games, quizzes, contests, news feeds, and so on. Organizations can use these to actively reach out to members and inject their message into the social media conversation.</p> |
| <p>Miscellaneous</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile device applications, especially on the iPhone and Blackberry • Specialty retail sites (“e-tailing”) such as Woot.com and Zappos • Casual gaming platforms • Non-conventional advertising, including in video games and virtual worlds |

Simply having a website or Facebook page will not add significant value to your organization. More and more, unions are realizing that creating content and messaging that engage audiences are necessary to achieving specific goals. **Abrams Research** has outlined five key goals for unions that can be achieved through effective social media marketing:

- 1. Engaging members**
- 2. Raising awareness for your issues**
- 3. Maximizing your services**
- 4. Mobilizing members**
- 5. Dealing with negative press**

The following sections will explain how social media can help achieve these goals, and discuss a selection of tools involved. We will also examine case studies of both labor unions and other non-profit organizations that are using social media well, and make recommendations for those struggling to establish their social media presence.



1. Engaging Members

Depending on the needs of your organization and the engagement of your member community, the use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and others can be more effective than traditional email blasts and mailers when reaching out to this community.

Facebook

In addition to creating and maintaining a network of known supporters, social media can play an important role in converting potential members. Those who may be unsure about joining with or giving their money to the organization will be able to see that others are engaged and active, making them more likely to trust that their time will be well spent.



CASE STUDY:

The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)

The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)

represents 70,000 performers, journalists, and other artists working in entertainment and news media. With over 33 local chapters in major media centers across the US, AFTRA has been working to move the communications and entertainment industry forward for 70 years through collective negotiation and other member benefits such as supplemental insurance, discounts, scholarships, and retirement funds.

Although AFTRA is a well-established organization, their social media presence is not as solid. They have a Facebook page, but it is only updated when there is a new article or post on their main webpage. There is no user-generated content, no discussion board, only a few photos and no video. The page then becomes a de facto extension of their main webpage, not an engaging platform itself. The description of the company is difficult to read and gives almost no information about what the organization does. Out of the tens of thousands of individuals that this organization represents, there are only 3,654 Facebook fans.

Abrams Research recommends not only integrating more information that is on the original website into the Facebook page, but also posting original content and engaging fans in conversations to help generate attention to the fan page and increase their visibility on this platform. Creating a "Discussion" tab would allow fans to ask questions and receive answers from the organization and their peers. This would also be an opportunity for AFTRA to ask questions of their fans and get feedback. AFTRA also has a YouTube channel, and integrating that platform into their Facebook page is a quick and simple fix that will make the page more substantial and interesting.

2. Raising Issue Awareness

Issue awareness is integral to the success of any trade or labor union. Maximizing the reach of an organization requires the use of both traditional and modern forms of communication. Unions should continue to serve their established audiences, while simultaneously reaching out to the latest generation and its popular trends. New media provide unlimited platforms for data transmission, and are invaluable in the search for new participants.

Using a number of social media tools and strategies, organizations can build an engaging online presence, and maintaining a blog and blogger outreach are two effective ways of reaching a larger subset of the target audience. As Internet trends rapidly shift toward social media outlets, a simple Internet presence is no longer an effective means

of engaging an audience. Internet users expect websites to be “open”: a frequently updated, interactive, direct connection to your organization.



CASE STUDY:

The United Steel Workers (USW) Union

The United Steel Workers (USW) Union is the largest industrial labor union in North America, representing the interests of over 700,000 members from the Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial, and Service Worker sectors in the United States, Canada and Caribbean. The USW Union wields considerable influence in American politics, most recently seen in its successful endorsement of Barack Obama during the 2008 Presidential Election. Aware of this influence, the USW Union has chosen to use a number of Web 2.0 technologies to further its political reach. Of these, the most impressive is the USW blog.

The USW blog focuses on issues affecting the lives of union members and their families. It is an open, welcoming platform where visitors can find posts representing the union’s interests, explore links to other materials, and contribute their own thoughts on pressing issues. On a logistical level, the blog is aesthetically pleasing and well organized: it is divided

into four separate idea strands (USW issues, the economy, etc.) and articles are archived and accessible by category and date. For example, visitors can easily locate posts written by AFL-CIO representatives, or if they wish, posts written by contributors from the Center for Working Class Studies.

What is most impressive, however, is the range of ideas and subjects that the USW blog tackles. If visitors are interested in reading about Health Care, the Economy or Job Security, the USW blog offers numerous posts on each subject. Furthermore, prominent members of national organizations and international unions are invited to share their opinions on pressing issues, collaborations that may result in highly beneficial partnerships and media exposure. When used effectively, such media exposure can lead to increased awareness and support from both union and non-union affiliated individuals.

Why then is the USW blog an effective marketing tool? The blog is effective because it gives a personal face to what the public may see as a large, somewhat obscure organization. In today’s untrusting political climate, all organizations, whether union- or corporate-based, are strongly advised to give the public what it wants—an easy way to learn about the organization’s leadership, interests and issues.

Blogs

Unions wishing to maximize the awareness of issues related to their community are well-advised to develop an active, content rich blog. Blogs are highly accessible platforms for free-form expression, and can easily be modified to fit the specific needs of any organization. A well maintained, organized, and accessible blog will offer potential volunteers and donors a “real-time” face for the organization. Updated, relevant content will be poised to capture and retain the attention and respect of information seekers and members.

Blogger Outreach

Blogger outreach is the process by which organizations solicit collaborations with independent bloggers specializing in a related field. Guest blogging (having an expert from your organization write an article for an outside blog), is an effective means of spreading awareness of your cause to a larger, more diversified audience. In such collaborations, a representative from the organization may choose to discuss the relationship between a current issue and the group’s work. This mutually beneficial situation often results in increased attention to the organization, as well as increased journalistic confidence in the outside blog.

There are many organizations, labor unions and non-profits alike, that are effectively using the guest blogging process to promote themselves and address their issues.



CASE STUDY:

The International Medical Corps

In response to the Haitian earthquake of January 2010, many domestic and international charities directed fundraising efforts toward guest blogging for Haitian relief. Margaret Aguirre, Global Media Strategist for the **International Medical Corps**, solicited help from readers of the popular blog, the Huffington Post. Her feature, entitled, “What Took Seconds to Destroy Will Take Years to Rebuild”, focused on the outstanding challenges that Haiti will face in the coming years and IMC’s strategies for initiating and stabilizing rehabilitation. In Port-au-Prince alone, Aguirre reports that the IMC runs the Haitian General Hospital, simultaneously organizes triage and acute treatment of patients, coordinates participating non-governmental organizations, and manages a facility that performs 30 to 50 surgeries each day. Aguirre ultimately estimates that the International Medical Corps treats 1,000 patients per day.

By clearly detailing obstacles and highlighting inspiring successes, Aguirre ensures that viewers form positive opinions regarding the IMCs mission and effectiveness. This article was then shared on personal Facebook accounts as well as ‘retweeted’ on Twitter by individual Huffington Post readers. Without such social-media tools, the IMCs reach would ultimately be limited to traditional websites, where it would hope that readers might ‘stumble’ across the article. However, social-media collaborations partnering traditional blogs and micro-blogging software (Facebook, Twitter, Digg) exponentially increase the chance that a feature will be read. Gone are the days when organizations were solely dependent upon proprietary marketing departments. Inspired independent readers can now easily disseminate the information themselves, effectively becoming self-appointed marketing agents for the organization and its cause.

Targeted Campaigns

Social media is constantly evolving, so the relative ease of updating and modifying information lends well to the ever-changing needs of running campaigns. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, which require relatively little effort to manage, are especially useful for smaller organizations that run a number of programs simultaneously.



CASE STUDY:

Relay for Life, University of Georgia

The University of Georgia has held annual Relay for Life events since 2000. In 2009, participants raised \$250,000, making UGA one of the top college relays in the world. To prepare for the 2010 Relay, coordinators began integrating Facebook and Twitter accounts. Starting in the summer of 2009, a Twitter feed was begun to update the UGA community on monetary fundraising milestones (\$110,000 as of early February), complementary initiatives (T-shirt drives, date auctions and rallies) and references to other college fundraisers. Participants who follow the feed are constantly updated on the status of all initiatives (their drive to raise \$48,000 in 48 hours was covered ever few hours for the entire fundraising period), and frequent congratulatory messages encourage followers to continue campaigning.

The UGA Relay for Life Facebook account coordinates with and builds upon its Twitter page with multimedia components. UGA Relay has supplemented its Facebook account with over 100 photographs of their initiatives (48in48 Spirit Run, the 2010 Relay Rally), links to the UGA Relay for Life store, and related video. One such video, entitled "The Great American Smoke Out", focuses on a

Relay-sponsored event meant to raise awareness for lung cancer mortality rates.

Using social-media, the UGA Relay for Life coordinators have built a substantial and far-reaching fundraising platform. Any individual interested in the initiative is introduced to a well-integrated and informative news stream that informs them of all Relay for Life-sponsored events. With over 3300 fans on Facebook and 400 followers on Twitter, the UGA population (already known for its stellar fundraising abilities), has recognized the power behind social-media, and uses it to its fullest advantage. With traditional media, which fails to facilitate direct communication between individual participants, coordinating events for targeted campaigns is often difficult and time-consuming. However, using social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook, campaign coordinators can easily manage multiple large-scale events, reach large numbers of followers, and more effectively focus on other aspects of the fundraising process.

3. Maximizing Services Offered

Unions can maximize their services by offering supplementary materials through social media platforms. Interested individuals, regardless of physical location, can find information regarding an organization’s issues, projects and community involvement. With open and accessible platforms designed to increase advocacy, unions are more likely to attract the interest of the global community.

Website Integration and Blogs

Organizations can maximize their effectiveness by offering access to their materials through blogs or general website integration. Uploading documents—surveys, questionnaires, informational pamphlets—will extend the depth of an organization’s online coverage, with the intent of drawing interested patrons into discovering more about the services offered. Online presence is often the first and definitive introduction of the organization’s operation to new audiences.



CASE STUDY:

Alzheimer’s Association Blog

The Alzheimer’s Association’s blog, **Actionalz.org**, is used as a platform for education, fundraising and lobbying congressional action. Actionalz.org includes tools for educating the public about Alzheimer’s warning signs and progression, current trends in diagnosis and treatment, and ways in which the public can enact change through congressional legislation. Interactive features, including a ‘Brain Tour’ (information on the brain’s relationship to Alzheimer’s symptoms) allow the Alzheimer’s Association to educate a world-wide audience, many who may eventually be affected by the disease.

Brain Tour

The Brain Tour is a 16-slide presentation that destroys the myth that Alzheimer’s is normal aging. On each slide, **roll over the colored text** to view special features on the slide.

[Send the Brain Tour to friends](#)

| | | | |
|---------------------|--|------------|--------------|
| Brain Basics | Alzheimer’s Disease and the Brain | Act | Links |
| 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 | 17 | Credits |

1. Three pounds, three parts NEXT →

Your brain is your most powerful organ, yet weighs only about three pounds. It has a texture similar to firm jelly.

It has three main parts:

1. The **cerebrum** fills up most of your skull. It is involved in remembering, problem solving, thinking, and feeling. It also controls movement.
2. The **cerebellum** sits at the back of your head, under the cerebrum. It controls coordination and balance.
3. The **brain stem** sits beneath your cerebrum in front of your cerebellum. It connects the brain to the spinal cord and controls

Applications

Use of the Internet grows more diverse each day. While some use the Internet to search traditional websites, the percentage of users integrating social-media platforms into their daily routines is rapidly expanding. As numbers increase, the strength and influence of these platforms will only continue to grow. Therefore, organizations that choose to feature social-media applications will remain ahead of the Internet 'learning curve', benefiting from the average user's desire, and newfound ability to interact with his or her surroundings.



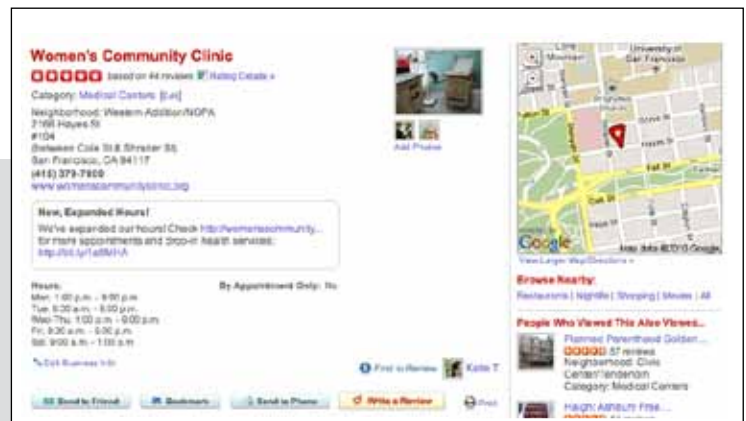
CASE STUDY:

Yelp and the Women's Community Clinic

In a November 2009 interview with the Yelp Official Blog, the communications director for the San Francisco Women's Community Clinic (WCC) touted the benefits of using Yelp to disseminate information and strengthen the center's general communications initiatives.

The WCC offers free women's volunteer training, health care and outreach services to Bay Area women and girls. The center has often relied on word of mouth and non-official web sources for information regarding the clinic's services. Using Yelp, the clinic has been able to combat consequent misinformation, monitor public perception and increase awareness for its cause. In cases where, for example, reviewers posted erroneous hours of operation, or incorrectly assumed that women with insurance could not benefit from the center's services, the WCC was able to immediately draft statements addressing the problem.

The Yelp location-based service was also heralded for offering current and potential clients the ability to interact directly and anonymously. The clinic, which often works with patients in sensitive situations, is



unable to provide case examples of its work to the greater public. However, individual patients who wish to share use Yelp or similar services to offer truthful critiques of their experiences, without fear of repercussion or identification.

As the best advocates are often those with relevant experience, the open, unrestricted ability to share on location-based services is beneficial for both organization and client population. For organizations, location-based services offer anonymous, disconnected clients a platform on which they can discuss relevant experiences and concerns. When organizations monitor such services and respond in an appropriate manner, the resulting connection between organization and client improves public perception and may lead to greater awareness for the organization itself. In an era where an ever-growing percentage of clients access information via-internet, location-based social-media services are highly efficient means for monitoring public perception, addressing issues and connecting with client bases.

4. Mobilizing Members

The features of social media that allow users to create communities based on similar interests or activities can be beneficial to organizations looking to develop a dedicated cohort of members that they can effectively deliver information to. Through social media, organizations can inform them of the organization’s progress, and call them to action when necessary.

Twitter

The fast-paced nature of micro-blogging services like Twitter makes them ideal for sending quick, mobilizing messages that are easily spread through online communities. The use of Twitter hashtags (#) ensures that the message will be seen by anyone on Twitter searching for that specific topic.



CASE STUDY:

@Habitat_org

Habitat for Humanity’s official Twitter feed not only tweets out information, blog posts, and the general activity of the organization, but also sends out requests when volunteers are needed. Those

who have decided to follow Habitat for Humanity are already invested in the organization, and will be a more open and willing audience.

Average U.S. home heating costs for the 2009–2010 winter season: \$977. Source: U.S. Energy Information Association

11:53 AM Jan 30th from web

Students across the country travel to build sites for spring break volunteering: <http://budurl.com/ppax>

12:08 PM Feb 3rd from web

Atlanta area volunteers are needed to pack Habitat recovery starter kits for Haiti: <http://budurl.com/ppax>

11:34 AM Feb 3rd from web

5. Addressing Negative Press

A well-developed social media strategy can give your organization the ability to deal with negative press issues as they develop. Effective incorporation of conversation and topical monitoring allows organizations to address

issues as they come up, and on the platforms where these discussions are taking place. With the right approach, non-profit organizations can use social media tools to turn a potentially negative situation around.



CASE STUDY:

Kiva

Kiva, an innovative approach to microfinancing for business in developing countries, is known for its openness and transparency. However, in 2009 Kiva came under scrutiny for allegedly misrepresenting its business practices. At the time, most lenders believed that Kiva allowed them to loan directly to the entrepreneurs featured in the stories published on its website. In actuality, Kiva paid money into micro-finance institutions, which in turn loaned money to businesses. As such, most of the stories featured on Kiva were of people who already had the loans given to them by certain micro-finance institutions. This was published on a prominent blog, and donors clamored for answers. The blog generated more than 10,000 hits and thousands of Twitter postings. Kiva's CEO and Co-Founder personally responded to the blog, and appeared as a guest blogger on the site that had criticized the organization. In the reply, the CEO clarified Kiva's practices, and acknowledged that Kiva did not do a better job at educating its lenders on the process. Kiva also made changes in direct response to the blog. Before, the Kiva homepage promised, "Kiva lets you lend to a specific entrepreneur, empowering them to lift themselves out of poverty," it now states, "Kiva connects people through lending to alleviate poverty."



CASE STUDY:

Yéle Haiti

The Yéle Haiti Foundation is a grass-roots charity organization that seeks to restore pride and hope to the Haitian people. Its founder, Wyclef Jean, was recently criticized for misuse of the foundation's money.

The group received an excess of \$1.5 million in donations shortly after a devastating earthquake hit Haiti, but TheSmokingGun.com revealed that IRS records show that the organization once paid Wyclef and his business partners in excess of \$410,000 for rent, production services, and charity performances. Tax returns also show that between 2005-2007 the organization spent a total of \$300,000 on consultants, and nearly \$225,000 on promotion and PR in 2006.

In response, Wyclef issued a personal statement via YouTube, in which he showed anger that he had to take time out of digging kids out of the rubble to defend the integrity of his foundation. He denied any wrongdoing, stating that running a charity is analogous to putting on a show, which has costs. Wyclef also became defensive, reminding the audience that he is Haitian, loves his people, and that he would not have contributed over \$1,000,000 of his own money to the organization had he been looking to make a profit.

Abrams Research recommends addressing this type of issue openly, and with respect for donors. While Wyclef started out the right way (a personal address) the defensive nature of his video makes him seem less credible. Every case is different, and a customized strategy is required in order to handle negative buzz online.

Conclusion

According to an Internet usage study by Universal McCann digital, over 80% of regular Internet users worldwide are participants in at least one vector of social media. As this ever-growing audience gains more and more control over what content it consumes, the balance of media power is shifting away from centralized traditional media outlets.

The fundamental goals unions once accomplished through a close relationship with major news sources are still within reach. Instead of providing content to these distributors, unions must now use social media to go directly to their members and the general public.

Abrams Research, with the world's most significant network of social media experts and new media professionals, has the expertise necessary to help unions understand and utilize the power of this new online realm. By examining the specific needs of a union, we can tailor-make a strategy to fit various social media needs, including:

- Providing guidelines for interacting with bloggers and influential social media figures
- Creating a "field guide" for ordinary employees to utilize social media while fulfilling a broader media strategy and adhering to policies
- Researching and analyzing online coverage of issues and organizations to develop a plan for handling future attention
- Writing and carrying out surveys of both media experts and social media leaders on subjects of concern to trade and labor unions
- Crafting a method for company executives to build personal images online
- Designing a plan for adapting a traditional name or service to social media
- Preparing for and responding to crises in new media and the blogosphere



By assembling a group of industry experts with the necessary knowledge to meet your union's needs, Abrams Research can help your organization connect to your audiences and spread your message in the critical, ever-changing world of social media.



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