Grassroots Fundraising Journal

VOLUME 34 NUMBER 6 • NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2015

A PUBLICATION OF
GIFT
Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training

Communicating Your Story to Build Support for Your Cause

Take Your Twitter Game to the Next Level

Swim With the Current on Facebook

Tell Your Story With Data

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FEATURE

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Can You Hear Me Now?

With the huge volume of information flowing through multiple channels around the clock these days, it can be challenging to get your message to stand out. This issue of the *Journal* is full of tips to help you tell your story in a convincing way that will expand your base and deepen engagement with your supporters.

We first hear from digital strategy consultant Meena Hussain, who shares some Twitter best practices that will help you develop effective tweets while maximizing your reach. Karen Topakian follows with a look at how two groups successfully use Facebook to spur their followers into action—from signing petitions to sharing posts to making financial contributions. Next, *GFJ* Editorial Board Member John Won shares the first in a series of three articles on infographics, explaining the value of data stories and how they can be used to strengthen your case through engaging visuals. And because we know communication is a two-way street, we close out the issue with a piece by Caryn Stein, who shares tips for ensuring an optimal donor experience this year-end fundraising season by putting ourselves in our donors' shoes.

Thank you very much to those of you who took the time to complete our Reader Survey last month. We are looking closely at your feedback and will be sharing the results (as well as the winner of the drawing for $100 in GIFT credit) with you soon.

Also, please save the date! Money for Our Movements: A Social Justice Fundraising Conference is coming to Denver August 12-14, 2016. We can't wait to return to Denver, where GIFT was headquartered for seven out of our first 10 years of existence. We'll be marking some big anniversaries next year: 35 years of the *Journal*, 20 years of GIFT, and 10 years since our first conference. We hope you can join us for another fulfilling conference and to celebrate the power grassroots fundraising.

As always, we wish you the very best in your year-end fundraising efforts and look forward to continue providing you with helpful fundraising tools and tips in the new year.

Jennifer

The cost of publishing the *Journal* is covered solely by subscriptions and donations made by people like you.

Please help us continue this valuable resource! Subscribe, renew or make a donation today at grassrootsfundraising.org or call us toll-free: 888-458-8588 x303. Thank you!

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Tips for Taking Your Twitter Game to the Next Level

By Meena Hussain

WHETHER YOU'RE JUST GETTING STARTED or have been tweeting for a while, here are some tactics you can use on Twitter to reach new audiences and expand your community.

Look and Feel

Taking a few extra minutes to design your twitter account with imagery that ties into your campaign will make your organization look more professional on social media. Twitter is a unique community with its own culture, codes and rules, and you need to understand that community to be a part of it.

What's What

Profile Picture: This photo is your identity on Twitter. It's the little picture that appears with your tweets in the feed. Since it is so small it's best to go with something clear and easy to see, like your organization's logo or a picture of your face. (Measures 400 x 400 pixels)

Header Image: This is the backdrop image behind your profile picture, similar to a Facebook cover photo. An iconic photo of your group's identity (or your own) will work best here. Examples include a photo of your members holding signs at a protest, a hard-hitting image of what you're fighting for, or a captivating image of where you're organization is based. (Measures 1500 x 500 pixels)

> **Tip:** Do you want to edit your design but don't have the software? Try Canva (canva.com).

Tweeting Effectively: Best Practices

Tweeting can be tricky sometimes. There is no formula for the perfect tweet—your audience may respond to something that some other group's audience may not. This section has some guidelines and tips based on my experience with tweeting for Greenpeace and industry research I've done.

Find Your Voice

It is in your favor to develop a distinct voice for your organization (or for yourself) so that your tweets can shine above the masses. This can be especially difficult if you're an organization, which is usually a collection of distinct voices. So don't be afraid to experiment with different voices to find out what sticks. Don't be afraid to fail—social media is all about iterations. Try something, look at how people react, adjust, and try again.

@greenpeacemx - A great example of a well-designed brand twitter page.

Tweets that travel well tend to:

- have a personal, human voice (you can be serious, funny, sarcastic, excited, etc.).
- contain interactive media (meme, photo, vine, video, link).
- cover breaking news from a distinct perspective. THINK: This news is important, but why is it important to our organization and audience specifically? Tell them in the tweet!
- have a strong theory of change. THINK: In a feed of thou-

sands of tweets, what impact will someone have by spreading the news, taking action, donating, reading the blog, etc? Tell them in the tweet!
- inspire the reader with positive news, compelling statistics, or an inspiring quote from a thought leader.

> **Tip:** If you're linking to a great blog post, use your reading comprehension skills from back in the day to find the most important bit of information that you want your followers to know—and turn it into the tweet. This will actually get people to click and read what you want them to.

Tweet Engagement

In order for tweets to reach as many people as possible, a couple of rules of thumb apply. Keep in mind that these don't have to happen for every single tweet you put out, but will be helpful when you want your tweets to really fly through the network.

- Keep your tweet at 120 characters or less to increase engagement. Some even say to keep it at 100 characters or less.
- Use no more than two hashtags per tweet. I know you might feel the urge to be as strategic as possible and add every relevant hashtag you can to each tweet, but research has shown a 17 percent decrease in engagement with tweets with more than two hashtags. Also keep in mind that this is not Instagram, and users don't want to read every other word in hashtag form.
- Tell your followers to retweet! Your followers don't know to retweet unless you tell them to, and tweet engagement is known to increase by 12 times when followers are asked to retweet. Write "RT" or "retweet" in front of the tweet when you have a specific call to action or strategically want to increase your engagement.
- Tweeting during business hours on weekdays and on weekends can help your tweets get more eyes. Think about how you or your friends use twitter. They might check it on their morning commute or with their first cup of coffee to get the top news headlines of the day. They might also check it on a Sunday morning to see if some of their favorite blogs posted something new.
- Network! Want to spread your campaign? Ask the right people to tweet it out to their network for you.

IT'S ALWAYS BEST TO JOIN CONVERSATIONS RATHER THAN CREATE YOUR OWN, OTHERWISE YOU RISK TALKING TO JUST YOURSELF.

The Ins and Outs of Hashtags

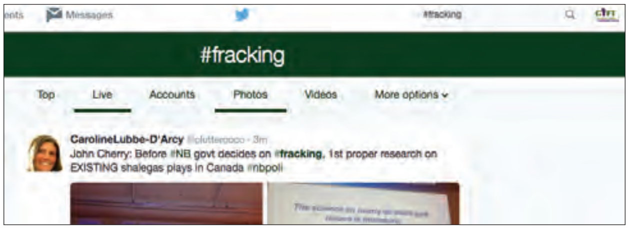
A hashtag is a word or a phrase prefixed with the symbol "#." It's a way for people to connect with and listen to conversations on Twitter. For example, if you include the "#stopmtr" hashtag in your tweets, people who care about stopping mountaintop removal can find your tweets—or you can search for other mountaintop removal tweets by searching for #stopmtr at search.twitter.com.

Why Use Hashtags?

Hashtags are a great way to expose your tweets to potential new followers who may be interested in your tweets. Do you have something relevant to say about a policy issue or a corporation? Well, there is probably a conversation already happening about it on twitter, and you want those people to hear what you have to say. It's always best to join conversations rather than create your own, otherwise you risk talking to just yourself.

Which Ones?

Hashtag research enables you to quickly find the most active conversation on Twitter about the issue you are advocating for. Here are some simple, easy steps to find the best hashtag for your conversation:



Hashtag search

1. Type '#' plus the word or phrase of the issue you are looking for in the search bar.
2. Choose "Live" to get timestamps of the real-time conversation.
3. Look at the timestamps to see how often tweets are going out with that hashtag. Compare them with other possibilities. Do you see one hashtag getting two tweets a day, and another getting five in one hour? If so, go with the more popular one!

In many cases, there will be multiple hashtags for a single issue. If we continue with the fracking conversation as an example, #fracking and #banfracking are two of many hashtags that make up the overall conversation of this issue. In addition to considering which hashtag is trending the most, I pick what is strategically best for my tweets, depending on what content I am tweeting. For example, if I was tweeting a news article on fracking I would choose #fracking because from what I see in the conversation, there are a lot of news-specific tweets. Conversely, when I was tweeting about a fracking rally in front of the White House, I used #banfracking for all of @greenpeaceusa's tweets because that was what activists were using, and the conversation about the rally and the anti-fracking movement was there.

So different audiences may be on different hashtags for your issue. Think about which audience you want to engage with each and every tweet, and use the best hashtag for it.

Tip: Do you see other hashtags being used in conjunction with the one you are searching for? Click on them and open those feeds in separate tabs to find a possibly more popular hashtag for your issue.

When do I start a new hashtag?

Starting a hashtag is often unnecessary. There are 500 million tweets sent out per day on Twitter, so there is probably a conversation happening about your issue that you should join. It's also very difficult to start a new hashtag and get other people to use it besides yourself, so I recommend doing your research.

Consider starting a new hashtag if:

- there is a part of the existing conversation on Twitter for your issue that you think is missing.
- the new hashtag will make the existing conversation more dynamic in some way.

If you do your research and decide a new hashtag needs to be started, go for it. The difficult part of starting a new hashtag is getting other people to join the conversation there. It's like getting your friends to come to the new bar across town only because it's near your house but not theirs!

Twitter Chats

A Twitter chat is when you have a real time conversation with a group of people on Twitter—for a specific amount of time—with everyone using and following the same hashtag to connect. Twitter Chats are usually scheduled for an hour, and that hour tends to fly right by.

Organizing a Twitter Chat can be a great way to build buzz for an event, engage Twitterati, or launch a hashtag into the world. You could say the #noKXL Twitter Chat held in August 2011 was what launched the now-pretty ubiquitous #nokxl hashtag into the world.

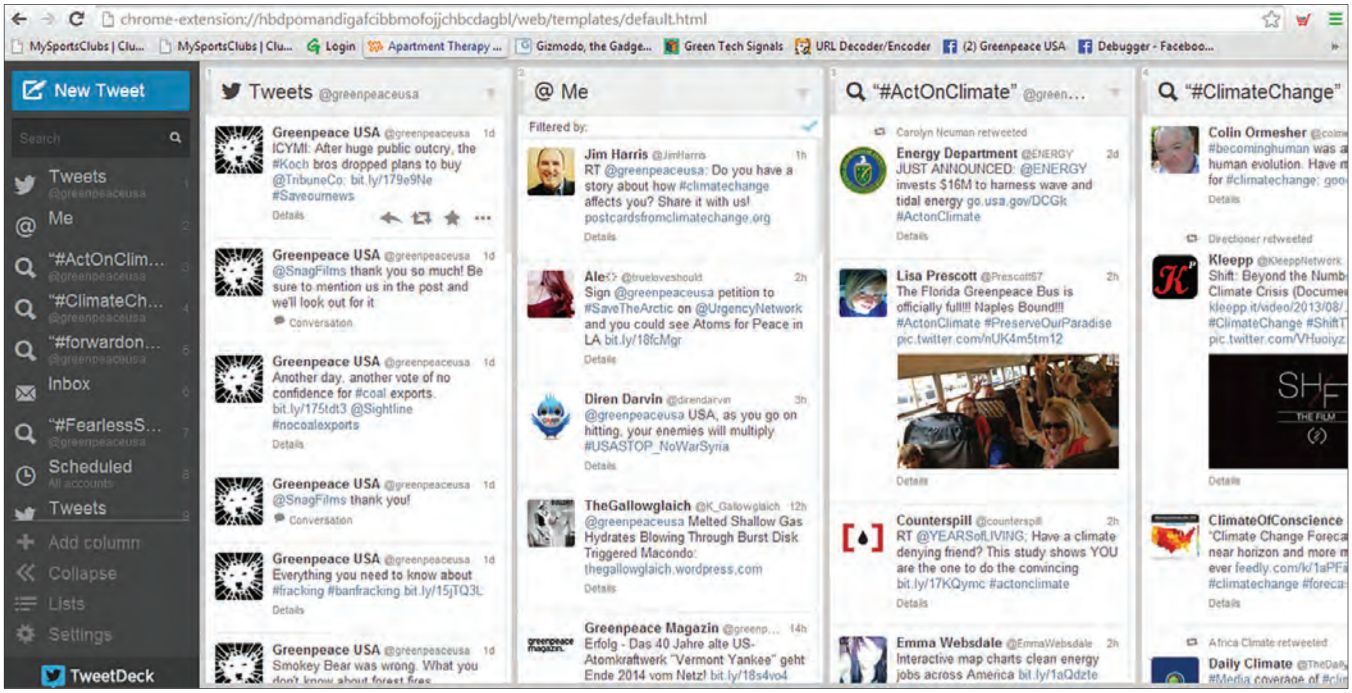
Below are some secrets to hosting a successful Twitter Chat:

- Invite and confirm about five featured guests.
- Prepare three to five questions you want to discuss and share them in advance with the guests.
- Promote the Chat well at least one week in advance (with a list of your featured guests).
- Be prepared to host the conversation in real time through your Twitter account—including asking questions, retweeting answers, connecting people, moving the dialogue along, etc.
- Invite all your followers to join in before the chat, and warn them that your tweet volume is about to get pretty high. (Some people even recommend creating a new Twitter account just for Twitter Chats and other live-tweeting events)

Live Tweeting

Live tweeting is citizen journalism at its best. You don't need major news networks at your event; all you need is your phone and a some good hashtags on your side to have your event reach a good chunk of people.

- *Make sure you're all set up ahead of time.* If you don't have a smart phone, you can set up SMS to tweet. If you do have a smart phone, make sure you have the Twitter app downloaded and that it's working smoothly.



Tweetdeck

- *Write out your tweets in advance.* Yes, I'm serious about this. When you're in the moment, your thoughts can get lost in the chaos and excitement. So it's best to write things down first and have an idea of what you want to communicate going into the event.
- *Tell the story of your event:* "[Insert Name] is speaking now," "Great quote from speech," "We're marching now," etc.
- *Pay attention to the world around you, not your phone screen.* Then take just a moment to blast out an update.
- *Follow up!* Interact with your followers, and tag them in conversations so that they feel included.

Tracking the Conversation

It's always helpful to keep track of how your Twitter communication and engagement is going. Here are some tools and tips that can help you evaluate:

- Tweetdeck is a tool that allows you to load multiple Twitter accounts all into one place. You can also schedule tweets, send out tweets on multiple handles at the same time, and have multiple columns loaded with hashtags and keywords for real-time tracking. There is a Chrome app for Tweetdeck, downloadable software for your computer, and an app for your phone.
- Hootsuite is another free service, and has added features for a low monthly price. It has added analysis functionality and allows you to run reports and have multiple team members on one account so you can all schedule tweets together.
- Use bit.ly or another URL shortener to track your tweets. This type of tool allows you to actually see roughly how many people clicked on your version of the link you put out, so that you can track engagement of your tweets.

When taking the suggestions in this article into consideration, remember not to feel too overwhelmed—you don't have to do every single thing on here right now! Just take it one day at a time and do what you can. Twitter is an ever-changing platform, so don't forget to talk about this with your friends and colleagues. You never know, you might learn something new. And I'm always available to chat via @meenazahra! ■

An earlier version of this article originally appeared in Green Meme's "The Most Amazing Online Organizing Guide Ever: A Practical Handbook for Community Organizers Who Want to Leverage Social Media for Social Change." Download your copy at greenmemesteam.tumblr.com/guide.

As a nonprofit consultant, Meena specializes in turning policy ideas into shareable social content. She facilitates organizations in developing a strategy around digital communications, and trains staff on best practices and tools to effectively communicate their campaigns to a digital audience.

Swimming With the Current on Facebook

By Karen Topakian

ORGANIZATIONS LARGE AND SMALL swim in a river called Facebook. Some plunge into the water over their heads. Others just dip their big toe into the fast moving stream. Regardless of how or how often organizations visit this watering hole, they need a plan to stay afloat.

Having interviewed a digital media consultant and leaders from two organizations with strong online engagement, I will share their tips, tricks, advice, successes, and lessons learned.

Courage Campaign

"Digital communication work is what we do. It's not part of what we do," says Eddie Kurtz, executive director at Courage Campaign, an online community fighting for a more progressive California.

And they do it all day long—post on Facebook, launch petitions, send email blasts, and tweet. According to Kurtz, they spend 75 to 80 percent of their budget on digital communication, which reaches 70,000 followers on Facebook, and 1 million by email.

"As an organization, we're always trying to increase our reach and engagement," reveals Kurtz. "We want to change the world and prove that the progressive solutions we can incubate in California can work."

Addressing their three big issues— economic justice, human justice, and corporate and political accountability—requires a plan. But they didn't take the traditional route of developing a detailed roadmap. "The overall communications plan is a set of rules," explains Kurtz. "It includes best practices on what sorts of projects we engage in and take on. It describes the resources that we allocate."

In order to determine what projects they take on, Kurtz and his staff pose the question, "Is there a theory of change for this campaign that engages members and leads to constructive organizing?" Kurtz defines theory of change as a campaign that inherently makes sense to their members, in which they understand why taking a particular set of actions will lead to progress.

According to Kurtz, organizations launch campaigns for a variety of reasons: "To change a policy; to get attention on an issue. Sometimes you do it to increase the organization's profile, though that's not the most important reason in the world."

When Courage Campaign develops an online campaign, they aspire to reach an audience that Kurtz describes as "Californians who are willing to take action by attending an offline protest, or signing a petition and sharing it with a friend."

Courage Campaign looks for campaigns that sit at the intersection of politics and policy. They found just that in their bottled water campaign, which addresses one of the most important issues for California today—the drought.

They launched an online petition drive to stop both Wal-Mart from selling water bottled from the Sacramento Municipal Water District and Nestle from bottling groundwater from drought-stricken California. More than 53,000 have signed the online petition against Wal-Mart and 175,000 Courage Campaign members signed the online petition against Nestle.

Courage Campaign also uses social media to support their fundraising efforts. For example, on the heels of filing a lawsuit against Nestle for illegally pumping water from the San Bernardino National Forest, Courage Campaign sent an email announcement about the lawsuit to their supporters, which raised $25,000. They followed this up with a Facebook post and a video release which together raised an additional $5,000.

Their most successful and effective campaigns to date engaged their supporters in LGBT activism, starting with Proposition 8,

Images the Courage Campaign shared with their Facebook followers after the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage.

the 2008 ballot initiative against gay marriage. "We produced fantastic graphics that reached 1.8 million people," boasted Kurtz.

In order to create their engaging graphics, Courage Campaign works with a few designers who can produce images for them very quickly. Their campaigners can also create some simpler graphics in-house by using meme generators.

Not everything Courage Campaign has tried has succeeded. A few years ago, they created a video for the Homeowner Bill of Rights campaign, which was fighting to ensure that banks, lenders and mortgage companies engage in fair lending and borrowing practices for California homeowners. Kurtz described their effort as a sad video about a man who committed suicide. The video didn't go over well with their supporters. Kurtz determined that they needed to find different ways to make people feel empowered and hopeful, while continuing to shed light on the harsh realities of injustice.

MAKE BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS A NUMBER ONE PRIORITY.

Despite the challenges, Kurtz offers sound advice about social media: "Value it. Do not to give it to some intern. It's harder than it seems to do it well. If you want it to be done well, you have to spend some resources on it."

Exhale

As the senior manager for national engagement at Exhale, Heather Buchheim manages everything from social media to website maintenance to email outcomes for this 10-year-old organization, which works to change the culture of shame and stigma about abortion. "It's a balancing act not to spend all day on Facebook," admits Heather. She does, however, spend 30 to 60 percent of her time at the controls of their Facebook, Twitter and email accounts.

With such a broad set of responsibilities, Heather needed a strategy, which she developed with consultants who focus on branding and marketing for nonprofits.

"We wanted a clear vision of strengths, challenges, and a road map. We knew that we had big opportunities on the horizon," explains Heather, referring to Exhale's Founder and Executive Director Aspen Baker's upcoming talk at TEDWomen and launch of her book, Pro-Voice. "We wanted to make sure that we had our house in order to take advantage of those opportunities to bring in new donors and supporters."

A Facebook share by Exhale from July 2014

Exhale's 2014 year-end donate page with a link to the trailer from their upcoming documentary.

Exhale's Facebook page has more than 4,000 followers, and 86 percent of them are women, most of them between the ages of 25 and 34. This demographic doesn't surprise Heather because it overlaps with that of the callers to Exhale's free national After-Abortion Talkline and the most common age range of people personally experiencing abortion.

Although they don't have an in-house graphic designer, they create visuals by using simple block quotes and adding a pro-voice hashtag and logo. They sometimes simply place a quote on a stock photo.

Exhale's best example of using social media in a multichannel way to raise money occurred during their 2014 year-end campaign. They met their $30,000 goal by driving traffic to a donate page featuring a video trailer from their upcoming documentary.

Heather lists several key pieces of advice to organizations trying to ramp up their digital communications:

1. Make building relationships a number one priority.
2. Acknowledge supporters in a timely fashion.
3. Provide consistent messages on social media and in emails. Tell stories.
4. Keep trying. Don't give up.

Like many online managers, Heather plans her online activities in advance as much as possible, while staying current and in the moment based on the news and what ally organizations are posting. Having clarified Exhale's communications strategy at the start, Heather has the framework and ability to "jump on news in the moment and be super nimble," which is a key tactic in reaching new audiences.

On July 27, 2015, shortly after an anti-abortion group released a video alleging that Planned Parenthood sold fetal organs for a profit, Exhale issued the following post: "Exhale is working with *Cosmopolitan* to bring forward the voices of women who have donated fetal tissue after abortion. Have a story to share?"

Creating fresh content based on breaking news underscores a core part of their strategy. Posting third party content from outlets like *NPR, Buzzfeed*, and the *New York Times* reflects their commitment to stay on top of the news cycle. They also republish or produce new content for *Refinery29*.

When Exhale re-posted a July 2, 2014, *New York Times* blog, "I Couldn't Turn My Abortion into Art," about a woman who was pro-choice but held conflicted feelings about her own abortion, their Facebook pages received shares in the tens of thousands. Then people began to share their own stories, just as Exhale hoped would happen.

Advice from a Digital Media Consultant

According to Meena Hussain, a digital media consultant who worked as Greenpeace USA's Social Media Strategist (and author of this issue's feature article), developing a content strategy is the most important element of any digital communications plan. She advises her clients to first create content pillars, which are the campaigns that they want to cover. Then she prompts them to further develop their content strategy by asking them a series of questions: What kind of video, photos and graphics will you post? How much and when? What's your strategy for finding third party content? Answers to these questions help her to develop a digital communications plan that her clients can manage.

One of the main foundations to understanding social media is to remember that it represents a two-way street, not a one-way megaphone. Standard practice suggests that Facebook content should include 20 percent original content and 80 percent third party. "You can increase or decrease the ratio of original content based on your campaign timeline, when you will naturally have more original content," proposes Meena. "The percentage of origi-

NARAL Pro Choice's post of a Comedy Central skit about birth control.

nal content can be a lot lower than you think."

Showcasing other voices will identify your organization as a thought leader and a place to go to learn about the issues. Your followers don't want to receive a constant barrage of marketing and sales information from your organization. They want to have a genuine conversation about the issues they care about.

As for where to find third party content, Meena explains, "You're probably already reading it with your morning coffee and organizing your events with them. Sharing related news and staying on top of what ally organizations are posting and talking about are two of the best ways to find third party content that will keep you relevant with your audience."

"Take advantage of media cycles such as Congress people trying to take away a woman's right to choose," suggests Meena. "Or comedians talking about the issues during their stand up segments."

She counsels her clients to showcase their well-established offline connections with thought leaders and celebrities in the online space. Finding ways to incorporate humor and keep content empowering rather than depressing are good rules to follow.

Meena cited an example of incorporating both ideas with NARAL Pro Choice's successful video post of a Comedy Central skit about birth control, starring Amy Schumer. In it, Amy represents a woman who needs to seek out the advice of people beyond her doctor, talking to her letter carrier, random people on the street and a very small boy, before obtaining birth control pills.

"NARAL took the time to build those connections offline," says Meena, who acknowledged the amount of copyright negotiations involved to be able to upload this segment directly to their Facebook page. "And their audience responded well. It garnered 261,863 shares and 62,606 likes. "

Meena strongly believes in posting dynamic visual content. "Videos and images are content kings," she says. "Facebook users are sharing these types of content more than status updates."

Currently, Facebook's algorithm, known as EdgeRank, favors embedded videos over all other types of content. Meena recommends that her clients upload their videos directly to their Facebook pages rather than sharing the content from a third party site such as YouTube. This tactic means that her clients' posts will rise higher in their followers' feed. Their followers will be more likely see them and, therefore, engage with the posts by liking, commenting on, or sharing them. The higher a post rises, the more people will see it when they check their Facebook page.

If a client wants to include video content in their digital content strategy, Meena recommends hiring someone who has experience producing videos for social media.

A new trend Meena has observed in successful video content is including written captions on videos that describe the content because videos now autoplay without sound as you scroll through the news feed. Though it's important to include sound, many people watch videos without sound on their mobile devices. She cites Facebook content from AJ+, *Al Jazeera's* interactive social platform, as the best example of this trend.

Another way to create dynamic visual content includes overlaying text on images. Users can put text over any images they have ownership over, using free services such as picmonkey.com. Adding text to an image will make it spread further on social media than just the image itself, so consider putting your call to action on the image, in addition to in the caption next time around.

Meena cautions against using jargon and language in social media that the average person wouldn't understand. "At Green-

A successful use of adding captions to video by AJ+

peace, we found that more direct language was more compelling," she explains. "If you're placing a photo, ask viewers to like, share and comment in the caption."

Tone and voice matter too. "Don't try to speak as if you are a media representative. Speak as if you are talking to a friend about your issue," says Meena. "The more genuine you are, the more popular your page will be."

Since everyone's Facebook audience is different, she urges her clients to get to know their audience by trying a variety of posts to see what receives the most engagement, and to not fear trying new things.

Digital plans should also include testing to ensure that messages work and reach the desired engagement level. Meena proposes thinking about a few different ways to present a piece of content to your audience and then trying out all the different ways over a week to see which one receives the most response. "Don't be afraid to post the same or similar content over and over again," she explains. "Less than one percent of your Facebook page audience receives your content, so it's highly unlikely that the same people will see the same post."

Hopefully, these words of wisdom from these digital media practitioners have strengthened your stroke, and thrown you the swim fins you need to confidently dive in headfirst. ■

Karen Topakian, owner of Topakian Communications, is a writer, communications consultant and activist. Karen worked for more than 35 years in the nonprofit world, including 16 years as the executive director at the Agape Foundation-Fund for Nonviolent Social Change. Currently, Karen chairs the board of Greenpeace, Inc.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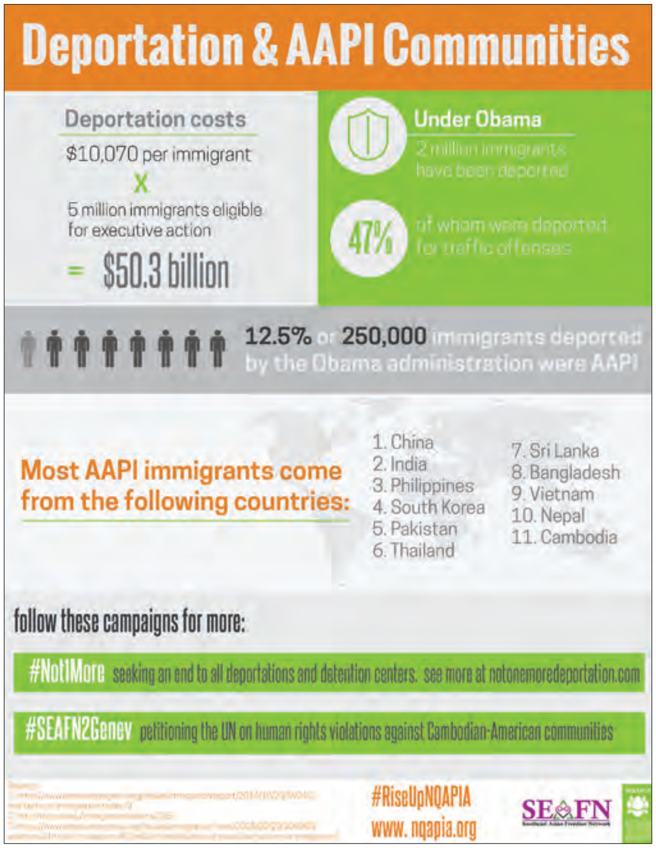
Telling Your Story With Data

By John Won

This is the first article in a three-part series on infographics.

IN AUGUST, I WAS UNPACKING A BAG from a conference I was attending for the National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Association (NQAPIA). In it, there was a bulging program booklet (over 100 sessions!) and countless other flyers. But what stood out to me were three short brochures filled with information graphics.

The first was a foldout map of LGBT API organizations in the US, kind of a census snapshot of queer API community building in 2015 (see image on next page). Another piece was a fact sheet on LGBT API immigrant rights (see image to right). Rather than having to wade through a potentially long, complex article about immigrant rights, this infographic prioritized key pieces of information and presented big data in visual sound bites. This article series will help your organization learn how to use this approach of visualizing communications in the service of better communicating with your stakeholders.



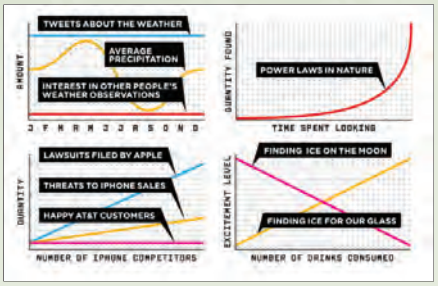
What's an Information Graphic?

An information graphic (or infographic) can be anything that communicates content in a visual format. What does this look like? It can be a bar chart with data over several years, visualizing what might otherwise be a paragraph of numbers. It can be a table that structures information that might typically be a list of bullets. Or, it can be a number set at a really big size to command importance.

Increasingly, infographics are going beyond print to become interactive digital experiences that invite the reader to discover

LGBT API Organizations in the U.S.

Felton Life Graphic



Wired Magazine's Statgeist: Charting Power Laws, iPhone Threats, Lunar Ice

AT THEIR BEST, INFOGRAPHICS PRESENT COMPLEX INFORMATION SIMPLY AND AUTHORITATIVELY.

more layers of information. You've probably seen this on the *New York Times* website or on special sites like slaveryfootprint.org. The format often depends on the nature of the story being told and the type of data being used, as well as the channels through which particular readers are being reached.

Why Should I Care?

Infographics can be effective communication tools. They can complement text and photos (especially for those of us who are "visual people"). They can punctuate key pieces of information, and at their best, they present complex information simply and authoritatively.

In this way, infographics can serve as a way to support new conversations. During NQAPIA's Week of Action on Immigrant Rights, Glenn notes that community members used their infographic brochure to articulate key talking points: "It's still a tool to support one-on-one conversations and ultimately to motivate people to take action."

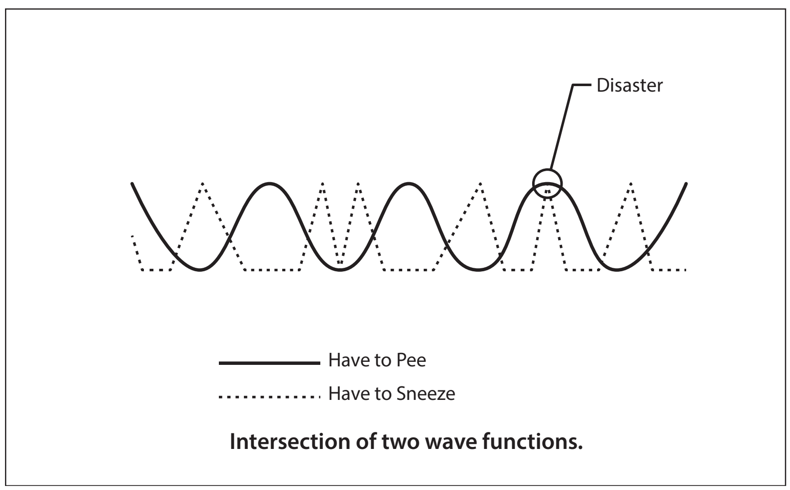
Are Infographics a Fad?

Ten years ago, graphic designer Nicholas Felton began publishing annual reports about his everyday life through visual design and data visualization. Soon after, infographics became a lingua franca of popular media and magazine publishing.

For example, each month Wired Magazine's Statgeist holds up a fun house mirror to American culture, providing unexpected commentary in chart form. Comedian Demetri Martin does something similar and ingeniously funny with his stand-up routines using flip-charts. By remixing information we're familiar with into a new format, we can see something unexpected, at times delightful, and infectiously memorable.

Lastly, there is a growing demand for data. It's part of a trend toward greater transparency and accountability. The Sunlight Foundation and Pew Research Center are examples of organizations making public data more accessible and understandable for mass audiences. This helps empower all of us to become more aware and make better decisions, personally and politically. For nonprofit organizations, collecting and sharing data can help communicate stories of progress and impact with community members, constituents, and other stakeholders like funders.

The popularity—and new norm—of infographics also means it's now easier than ever to visualize data and information through new easy-to-use online tools. But not all infographics are good. Many infographics don't tell compelling stories, or worse, give confusing or misleading representations. This is because many people don't know how to tell a good story with data, and many designers may not know best how to express data visually. Stay tuned for the next installment, where we'll discuss a few rules of thumb for designing a great infographic.



Demetri Martin

How Can I Try?

In the meantime, you can play with Google Sheets, a free online spreadsheet tool that offers a great range of visualization options for data which you can easily share and collaborate with others on. Microsoft Excel also has a standard set of charting tools. And Tableau Public is a free online software for PC users with professional-grade visualization tools. ■

John Won is design lead at ideo.org and serves on the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* editorial board.

The One Thing You Must Do to Prep for Year-End Fundraising

By Caryn Stein

IT'S NO SECRET THAT DECEMBER is huge for fundraising. With #GivingTuesday and annual appeals, most organizations see a large share of their annual revenue in December. Network for Good's *Digital Giving Index* reports that nearly one-third of all annual donations on the online giving platform comes in the last month of the year. So, how can nonprofits make the most of all of this generous activity?

Beyond creating the perfect appeal or finding the right donor, there's one thing that fundraisers absolutely must do to ensure they're maximizing their year-end fundraising efforts: It's simply to be the donor.

Too often we get so caught up in our point of view as nonprofit fundraisers and marketers, we forget to connect with the very thing that will help us better connect with our donors. And that's to put ourselves in their shoes and remember what it's like to be a donor.

At Network for Good, we encourage all nonprofits to observe a "Be Your Donor Day" each fall to prepare for the influx of activity at the end of the year. This is an opportunity to step into your donor's shoes and walk through your entire fundraising and marketing experience from their perspective.

Without understanding how our donors interact with our organization, what the donation process looks like from a donors' point of view, and how donors are thanked for their gift, we can't do much to improve (or overhaul!) the process.

Before the crush of late December, set aside some time now to look at your nonprofit's marketing materials, fundraising experience, and online presence from your donor's perspective. Consider how to refocus your fundraising efforts on the donor experience at each touch point your supporters have with your organization.

It's one thing to think like a donor, but take it one step further and play the role of a new donor to your organization. Try searching for your nonprofit, reading an appeal, or visiting your website, and then attempt to make a donation. Some simple testing can uncover significant issues that could negatively affect your fundraising results this year.

As you test your process from your donor's point of view, ask yourself these three key questions:

1. Does it work?

First things first. If your emails, websites, landing pages, and other elements have technical issues, get those resolved. If these things are just plain broken, then none of the rest of your outreach will matter. Test your website and donation page functionality, as well as that of your email appeals. Also, test the various ways that people can get in touch with you. If a donor has a last-minute question, you want to make sure they can quickly reach someone at your organization, instead of getting an error message or a disconnected number.

2. Does it flow?

Think about meeting your donors' expectations when they interact with your campaign. When donors follow a call to action or take a next step from your emails, website, or other outreach, does the result make sense? Are they taken to where they expect to go, or do they get lost? Are there too many steps or are your calls to action confusing or misleading?

3. Does It Match?

As you create or update your year-end fundraising campaign materials, keep in mind your goal is to achieve maximum message match. That is, your images, language, and giving options that appear on your website and donation pages should be consistent with your appeals and campaign type. If your appeals focus on supporting one particular program in your organization, don't make donors hunt to find how to designate their gift. Ensure that the look and feel of your communications all tie together. This builds consistency and helps reinforce your core message. You do not want donors to feel like you've switched the story mid-stream.

How to Test Your Donor Experience

Here is a simple outline for testing your giving experience and communications to ensure they're easy-to-use, easy-to-understand, and create a moment of inspiration for your supporters.

First, put on your donor hat and run through your organization's website:

- Find (and test) your nonprofit's contact information or contact form. Do these submissions go to the right place? Do donors get a confirmation that their message was received?
- Call your phone numbers, test your phone tree (if applicable), and see if you reach a real person or hit a dead end. Are the phone numbers you list accurate, and do they connect donors with the right people in your organization?
- Make sure you can locate your donation page and easily click to make a donation.
- Subscribe to your email newsletter and find out what happens next. Can you find a way to easily subscribe to your list?

Next, ensure your online donation page is easy to use:

- Does the language and design of the donation page reflect the campaign materials and your nonprofit's brand?
- How many fields do you need to fill out to complete your gift? How long does it take?
- Is it easy to make a recurring gift?
- Are there suggested donation amounts?
- What happens once you submit your donation? Are you prompted to share and learn more?
- Do you immediately get a receipt? How long does it take to get a thank you for your donation?

Apply the same scrutiny to any direct mail response devices:

- Are the giving options easy to understand?
- Is it clear the impact a donor's gift will have?
- Is there an obvious way to reach out to your organization if a donor needs assistance or wants to discuss a larger gift? Is this contact information up to date? Do phone numbers and email addresses get a donor to a real person?
- Are there clear instructions on payment options and how to return the response?

Then, make sure your communication channels are up to date:

- Do your email and direct mail templates match your fundraising campaign and nonprofit's brand?
- Is the contact and other standard information in your letterhead or template accurate?
- Who is the sender for your email communications? What happens when you reply to this address?
- Do your social media profiles have accurate contact information and descriptions of your work?

Now, whip out your smartphone and repeat all of the above for any online channels—how does everything look and work? More donors are viewing your appeals and sites via smartphones, so ensure that your supporters can read and act on your materials from their mobile devices.

Go Beyond Your Internal Review

Once you have completed this process internally, ask a volunteer or current donor to complete the same test. Then, ask someone completely unfamiliar with your organization to visit your website and attempt to make a donation. Can they find the information that they need? Is the process clear? Ask them to verbally describe the process and their thoughts or questions at each step. For best results, do these tests in person so you can observe their body language and facial expressions—often your testers may not be able to tell you right away that they are having trouble, but you can catch these nonverbal cues and hesitation that signal that your site or donation process may be more confusing than you expect.

Make it your mission now to find and fix any problems that may trip up your donors before the busiest giving days of the year. You still have time to improve and optimize the process—and get more out of all the hard work you're putting in this season.

For more tips on how to improve your giving experience in time for your year-end fundraising campaigns, download a copy of Network for Good's free *Three-in-One Donor Experience Guide.* ■

Caryn Stein is vice president of communications and content at Network for Good.

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