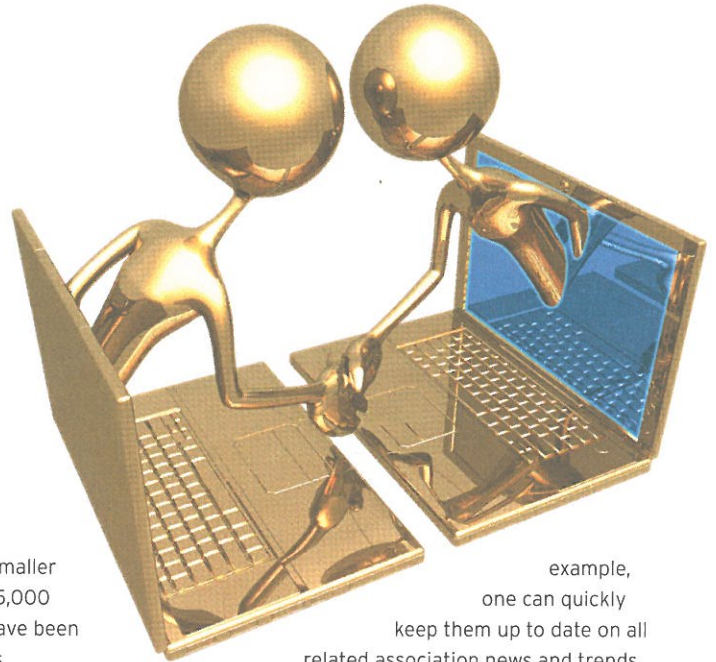


# CAN AN ASSOCIATION GROW VIA SOCIAL MEDIA?

IN LESS THAN FOUR YEARS, SOCIAL MEDIA HAS GONE FROM A TREND TO A WELL-ESTABLISHED AND WIDELY USED MARKETING AND PROMOTION TOOL. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ARE READY TO BE USED AND FREE OF COST. NONETHELESS, RESOURCES HAVE TO BE ALLOCATED AND ACTIONS PLANNED. SPECIALLY, SINCE ANY ACTIONS TAKEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA WILL GO LIVE AND CAN GENERATE REACTIONS IMMEDIATELY. TEXT CLÁUDIA FORTES, MARKETING & COMMUNICATION MANAGER, MCI BRUSSELS



## Which social media tools are being used by associations?

A majority of associations are already using LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Slide Share and Blogs. The marketing and communications done by associations have dramatically changed in the past few years with the integration of these new tools in the traditional marketing and communication approach. But what are the main differences in use of social media and examples of successful use?

### + LinkedIn for professional development:

known for being the platform for professional use, networking and job prospecting. Due to its professional nature, several industries have been favouring the use of LinkedIn and creating groups. LinkedIn groups can be created either by making it a membership benefit with a closed or open LinkedIn group to create a wider platform for the profession to discuss the most current topics. Associations in engineering and pharmaceutical industries (with a membership range of 120,000 to 200,000 globally) have often been opting for a closed LinkedIn group due to the nature of the topics discussed. And associations in services, telecommunications

and education (often smaller membership range of 5,000 to 10,000 in Europe) have been opting for open groups.

### + Facebook for social interaction:

the biggest social media tool with over 500 million active users. The interaction on this tool is very high and normally users are eager to join new pages and groups since they probably already are using this tool. Most associations have been using this tool to promote their events and new initiatives/releases. Interaction and feedback comes easily on this platform and discussions are lively. There is the case of a large association in engineering, with over 120,000 members globally, that has been using Facebook as the main tool to promote their educational events and launch of new publications. The success has proven to be on the increase of attendance to their events.

### + Twitter for spreading the word:

the fastest marketing promotion tool. With one free click and post an association can reach more users than with traditional and costly marketing. With 2,000 followers for

example, one can quickly keep them up to date on all related association news and trends. The more followers the association is able to gather on Twitter the wider the promotion efforts can spread. The secret is in being active enough with tweets/posts and following other related profiles on Twitter to ensure that the number of followers grows exponentially and thus the target audience increases as well.

## How can associations combine the use of several social media tools for a winning event?

For a large international association in professional development, with over 450,000 members worldwide, the latest regional congress relied mainly on e-promotion. A mix of promotional tools was used, such as online advertisement (to ensure a better measurement of the ROI), monthly regional e-newsletter, e-blasts, and different social media groups (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and RSS Feeds).

This promotional strategy proved to be successful not only in achieving the target for

attendance but also in the overall connection of members and non-members and promotion and awareness of the association's mission, products and services. Communications were sent faster and the feedback given immediately allowed for new reactive actions to be put in place rapidly.

The open rates and views of the e-blasts average the 30 to 45% (out of a target audience of 40,000), online advertisement was measured weekly and was obtaining 100 to 250 views per week (the whole campaign was for 5 weeks), the brand new LinkedIn group had an average of 100 new members per week, and its interaction and discussions initiated by members was of around 2 to 3 posts per week.

### So, what are the golden tips for successful results?

#### + POSTS:

take the time to draft and schedule the placements of the posts for Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The planning of actions for social media will ensure a well thought out messaging and focus.

#### + MAKE IT INTERACTIVE:

make sure that posts are done in a question format to originate discussions amongst the members in order for the group to be as interactive as possible. The titles of the discussions can also be drafted to be good appetiser for a larger topic.

#### + GROW FROM 0 MEMBERS TO ALL THE WHOLE MEMBERSHIP AND MORE:

check on the options 'invite' and download

excel lists of members' contacts. With one click a whole list will receive an invitation automatically. But be careful with data protection rules!

#### + SOCIAL MEDIA GURU:

resources and time have to be allocated. It might only take 5 to 10 minutes per day but monitoring the interaction on the social media platforms is vital.

#### + JOIN AND FOLLOW:

to guarantee that all members join and participate on social media platforms and groups, include the social media icons with embedded links to the groups on the website, e-blasts and/or e-newsletters.

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# TEN TIPS FOR CREATIVE CONTENT

YOU'VE HEARD IT - CONTENT IS KING AND WHILE WE CAN ARGUE WHETHER IT'S CONTENT, EXPERIENCE OR PEOPLE THAT BRING YOUR MEMBERS BACK TO YOUR SITE AGAIN AND AGAIN, THERE'S NO ARGUING THAT CONTENT IS IMPORTANT.

The goal is to offer up-to-date, unique, easily-accessed content. You'll need membership software that allows quick content changes and uploads to your website and online community as well as an ability to limit who has access to content. Here are ten tips to creating extraordinary content.

**1. Winning.** Give them a reason to log in for the first time. Sponsor a contest or hide an icon somewhere on your site and the

first member who finds it wins a prize. If you have multiple blogs on your site you can hide clues in the content thus driving readership. Your goal here is to get them to sign up and update their contact information. Your members will get to experience your great new online community.

**2. Twinkle, twinkle.** You're a star. Feature members or a vendor site monthly. Make it a special announcement. Allow others to nominate their favorites. Give prizes or make a donation in the recipient's name.

**3. Write away.** Give your members a platform for their knowledge exchange, be it in the form of a personal blog, wiki or member profile on your site. When people are empowered to share you'd be amazed at what they do. But don't overlook the non-writers in your group. If photos are more

their thing or they are particularly proud of a presentation they gave recently, why not allow them to upload it?

**4. If you ask me to...** Ask your members a question. Remember the art of conversation? One of the first suggestions in getting someone to talk is to ask them something about themselves. It can be as simple as a survey on past organization events. Or you can get creative by asking them to submit a video answer to a question. Maybe your association is celebrating a milestone. Ask them why they first joined your organization. Offer an incentive to take part, a contest - most creative reason wins a flip video camera. What you are aiming for is traffic and repeat traffic.

**5. Silly org, games aren't (just) for kids.** Gamification (yes, that is a word) is