Cat Videos for a Cause:
A Nonprofit Social Media Marketing Case Study of the Central Brevard Humane Society

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter explores the progression of a mid-sized nonprofit organization, the Central Brevard Humane Society (CBHS), as it embraces social media as part of its marketing and communications strategies. This case study explores how CBHS has used Facebook to advance its mission despite experiencing common challenges faced by nonprofit organizations when using social media. CBHS was able to overcome some of these issues through solutions and opportunities that can be used by other mid-sized nonprofit organizations to better integrate social media into their own marketing and communications strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Social media tools have become increasingly prominent as marketing tools for today's nonprofit sector. The tools range from conversation starters (such as blogs, YouTube, and Twitter), to collaboration builders (including wikis and Google groups) to network builders (like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter). These tools and others have changed the marketing landscape, especially for the smaller, traditionally cash-

strapped organizations. Many nonprofit organizations have found that incorporating social media into existing marketing efforts can engage stakeholders to become more involved, create a sense of community, attract new supporters, enhance brand management, and offer an effective direct communication channel to supporters and members of the media. Unfortunately, too many nonprofit organizations begin using social media tools without a clear plan or understanding of how to use these tools strategically (Wymer & Grau, 2011).

Using social media tools for online marketing communications, advocacy calls to action, education and service provision requires a sea change in how nonprofit leaders must view traditional marketing strategies and organizational structures. While traditional communication tactics are often driven by the organization, it is the users or community that drives social media content (Wymer & Grau, 2011). Organizations stand at the crossroads in time between the well-worn road of tried and true media and marketing outreach strategies and the unpaved path of new on-line networking possibilities. Leaders therefore must develop the support culture, human resource structure, and policies needed to allow for constant adaption in the quickly changing environment. Such a complex socio-technological issue should be examined internally and externally, taking individual and collective expectations and needs for policy, training, and management into account for a holistic evaluation of evolving best practices.

The purpose of this case study is to document the experience of the Central Brevard Humane Society (CBHS) as it makes a cultural shift to embrace social media, particularly Facebook, as a key marketing and communications tool. CBHS is a mid-sized animal rescue organization located in Florida. Like many other nonprofit organizations, it jumped into the social media waters without a strategic plan. Without a plan, the organization was unable to clearly determine the impact of social media. In turn, it was difficult to allocate human and financial resources to social media. Realizing this tension, CBHS decided to re-examine its use of social media and find ways to better incorporate it into the organization. This case study follows CBHS through its first months of this transition, documenting the changes needed for social media to have a greater impact.

The research questions stemming from the case seek to describe the challenges the organization faced as it transitioned to a more networked organization. In addition, opportunities the organization chose to overcome these challenges are described. This case seeks to address three specific research questions:

1. How can an animal welfare organization use social media to help meet its mission?
2. How can a nonprofit organization overcome obstacles common to implementing a social media plan?

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