



ISSUE BRIEF

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES: Starting Conversations About Health Care Reform

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» INTRODUCTION

Social media strategies are now an essential part of many advocacy campaigns. Trainings, tips and recommendations on the use of social media abound. Yet many social media campaigns by nonprofits and advocates have the potential to fall flat. Audience numbers can be low, responses to Facebook and Twitter posts few and far between, and it is often unclear whether the campaign is really making a difference.

The increasing use of social media as a campaign strategy carries a perceived risk of “clicktivism” or “slacktivism” (see definitions below) that doesn’t lead to more active involvement.¹ Indeed, a minimal level of involvement that does not go beyond clicktivism could fail to tap into the potential of social media as an advocacy tool.

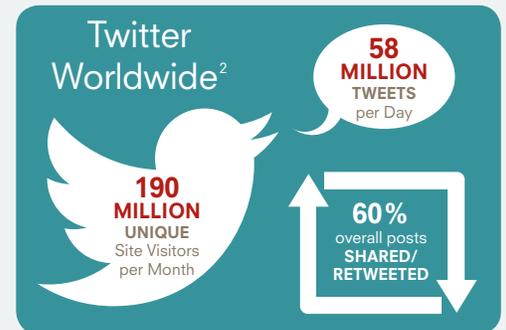
However, when handled well, social media can be a stepping stone to greater engagement of volunteers and/or supporters. In other words, social media by itself does not make for an effective strategy, but it can be a very valuable tool if effectively integrated into a larger advocacy strategy. *(Introduction continued on page 3)*

Who is using social media?

Social media is a powerful, increasingly ubiquitous form of communication and engagement that has captured global attention.

Research on social media indicates that it has become commonplace in American society, with 73 percent of adult Internet users

visiting a social networking site like Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram or Twitter.³ Facebook use far outstrips other social networking sites, with 71 percent of all adult Internet users visiting it, compared to 18 percent of all Internet users who are on Twitter. Also notable is that 42 percent of adult Internet users visit multiple social networking sites, indicating that those who use social media are often active across multiple social networking forums. Moreover, people who use these sites use them often: 40 percent of Facebook users and 46 percent of Twitter users visit several times a day.⁴



Clicktivism and Slacktivism: Passive support of social movements, where individuals engage in the most limited of ways, and with little or no in-person engagement. “Clicktivism” usually refers to passive online actions like sharing other organizations’ content. “Slacktivism” can mean any passive action, whether online or not, like retweeting on Twitter or wearing a LIVESTRONG bracelet to support cancer awareness.

» SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES PROJECT HEALTH COLORADO

Project Health Colorado (PHC) was created and funded by The Colorado Trust, a statewide grantmaking foundation, to organize a group of organizations and individuals interested in discussing health care issues, learning more and standing together to make health care work better for Coloradans. By asking questions, getting straight answers and encouraging people across the state to be part of the solutions, PHC helped influence how decisions are made about health care. PHC built on the work of 13 organizational partners to help foster the necessary awareness, understanding and, ultimately, support for the kind of changes that will help achieve access to health for all Coloradans. Additional funding for those partners was provided by the Colorado Health Foundation.

PHC had its own social media strategy that included a PHC website, Facebook page, Twitter account and paid media campaign (e.g., promoted posts on Facebook). The following five organizations also used their own social media strategies for public will-building:

Colorado HealthStory was a collaboration between the



Colorado Rural Health Center, Colorado Coalition for the Medically Underserved and ClinicNet. Colorado HealthStory engaged community members in sharing their story via audio clips and then shared stories back to the community through social media.

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative

(CCHI) advocates for all Coloradans via a network of members and champions throughout the state. CCHI used e-newsletters, Facebook and Twitter to provide sample messaging to members, highlighting legislative activity related to health care and motivating engaged citizens to take action.



9Health Fair collected stories from participants at their health



fairs throughout Colorado, catching people in the moment of accessing preventive health care information. The stories were primarily shared through social media and were often accompanied by discussion forums and content integrated with the 9News media strategy.

Get Healthy SLV!

used social media and service-learning projects in the San Luis Valley to increase awareness and support for access to health care. Their bilingual, interactive website featured user-generated content from high school and college students across the valley, as well as connecting users to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.



Children's Hospital Colorado

Children's Hospital Colorado and the **Colorado Children's Campaign** videotaped the experiences of families learning to advocate at the state capitol for policy change. Both types of stories were used on their websites, and shared on Facebook and YouTube. During events, these organizations used live-tweeting (posting in real time on Twitter) to engage individuals unable to attend in person.



This brief is intended for advocacy organizations and funders using social media as part of an advocacy strategy, particularly those engaged in advocacy around health and health care reform. It provides tips and guidance from the experiences of Project Health Colorado (PHC), a 2011-13 community-focused effort designed to engage individuals and organizations in a statewide discussion about health care and how it can be improved. Social media was one of many strategies used in PHC and the social media activities alone reached over 200,000 people.

The brief will introduce a set of five steps to develop a social media strategy that can engage audiences as part of a campaign, building on lessons from PHC. It will explore nuanced details of social media, such as how the elements of a post or blog can affect an audience's motivation to take action. Finally, the brief will explore how to overcome the risks of passive social media engagement, demonstrating that social media campaigns can directly engage audiences, raise awareness and share information while motivating audiences to take further action.

The information in the brief comes from the evaluation of PHC, where the analysis explored social media use by grantees and a paid media and mobilization campaign. It includes information from a variety of social media strategies including interactive websites, Facebook and Twitter, all used to engage audiences in building awareness, understanding and personal conviction to improve access to health care in Colorado. Some of the social media strategies connected with in-person advocacy opportunities, and the brief will explore what made those combinations work.

» THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Unlike traditional forms of media, social media allows for interactive experiences, both with content and other users. Messages and posts can be critiqued, "liked," shared or validated by individuals or organizations instantaneously, meaning that the reach of information and opinion extends far beyond the original contributor and traditional parameters of numbers of listeners, viewers or readers.

Recent events have further highlighted the power of social media. The hashtag #BringBackOurGirls was used to call global attention to schoolgirls kidnapped in Nigeria, with some analysts suggesting that the campaign raised sufficient awareness to help spur the Nigerian government to action.⁵⁻⁷ While the success of #BringBackOurGirls (and #YesAllWomen, following the May 2014 shooting in Santa Barbara, California) raises questions about "hashtag activism"—specifically, whether passive online actions can translate into real-world effectiveness—there is no denying the power that social media has to draw people to a movement.

Moreover, recent studies have found that there is a spillover effect between online and offline action—in other words, engagement on social media may lead to greater real-world activism. One study specifically found that "health slacktivism" had a positive effect on intention and adoption of new behaviors.⁸ Unlike traditional forms of media, social media coalesces people with common interests or causes, allowing them to generate "buzz" around the issues that matter personally.

» WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

There is real value in an engaging, interactive, well-integrated social media strategy. Notably, a well-crafted and well-managed campaign can effectively support other aspects of advocacy efforts. The main drivers of engagement in social media are salient, often user-generated content, closely tied to specific opportunities for interaction.⁹⁻¹² PHC's evaluation found these two elements were powerful contributors to social media engagement. However, there are specific aspects

Social media strategies can be more effective if they focus on the "I"s:

- Initiate the conversation
- Interest your audience
- Influence opinions
- Incite action
- Integrate media strategies.

of content and interaction that drive greater participation. The PHC evaluation found that there are five important steps to follow to create powerful social media content: initiate the conversation; interest your audience; influence opinions; incite action; and integrate media strategies.

Initiate the Conversation

At its core, a public advocacy campaign needs to get the public talking about your issue. However, a conversation doesn't begin simply because you have shared information through social media. Instead, initiating a conversation needs to be proactive, challenging and engaging for your audience. Starting a conversation with a question, something provocative, edgy or even a little controversial is a good way to motivate discussion. Encourage your audience to share their own opinions, vote or "like" a statement and explain why they feel that way. By challenging your audience, you can begin a real dialogue and help

participants feel they have an opportunity for their voice to be heard.

During the PHC campaign, 9Health Fair initially used social media to share information about local health fairs and included a tagline encouraging participants to "join the conversation" in their posts. However, they quickly learned that more targeted engagement, such as asking direct questions and encouraging opinion-sharing, was required to really develop a community conversation.

By asking questions and integrating hot topics from the news and pop culture, they were able to generate a more active group of participants. They refined this approach by tracking what social media content was driving the most interest. This highlights how initiating conversations serves the dual purpose of getting the public to actively engage with your issue while also providing a "thermometer" for your content.

» **9Health Fair Sample Facebook Posts**

"Opening Day is right around the corner. The traditional 9 days of the 9Health Fair begin on April 21st. Governor Hickenlooper and Mayor Hancock have it on their calendars. Do you have it on yours? Find a fair near you at www.9healthfair.org/findafair" (4/5/12)

"We believe that getting affordable health care isn't too much to ask. 9Health Fair provides that entry-point to care and everyone deserves follow up care without barriers like lack of insurance or high costs. How do you feel about health care in Colorado? Tell us! Your voice matters!" (3/29/13)

Interest Your Audience

With the vast amount of information available on the Internet today, social media campaigns have to work hard to capture your target audience's attention. The success of a campaign relies on people feeling that the issues are relevant to their lives—so much so that they are willing to take further action. A powerful story is one approach to building this emotional connection; it can help participants connect on a personal level, raise their awareness of the issue and motivate them to engage. The PHC evaluation found that when a story creates an emotional response—such as anger, frustration or even a feeling of being empowered to make a difference—it is more likely to inspire the reader to want to take action. Social media, with written, audio and video opportunities, can be an effective way to share a good story.

Colorado HealthStory and Children's Hospital Colorado combined the power of social media and storytelling to share the personal experiences

» **Children's Hospital Colorado Sample Facebook Post**

"Need some inspiration before Election Day? Watch this short video and find out what Colorado kids speak up for. Your voice matters, too! Speak Up!" (11/1/13)

of Coloradans, better publicizing policy issues in the process. These grantees used compelling, relatable, emotionally engaging stories as drivers of further interest and action among their social media audiences.

Influence Opinions

The goal of most advocacy campaigns is to inform and influence key audiences, which in turn can help shape policy decisions. When it comes to engaging audiences, a strong messaging framework is one of the greatest tools for advocacy organizations. Social media can provide a uniquely cost-efficient delivery method for your messages to large numbers of people.

A messaging framework is a coherent set of statements designed to convey what you want your audience to believe in an easily accessible way. The reach of a campaign can be broadly expanded when messages are well-integrated into social media. Messaging can be easily embedded into every post, tweet, blog or video in subtle yet memorable ways, meaning that your target audience is both receiving your content and expanding your reach with every share or retweet.

During the PHC campaign, CCHI's comprehensive strategy to support members' use of social media included training on social media software, empowering individuals to use the technology, and consistently providing new and innovative sample posts and tweets to be adapted by members in their own materials. As a result, CCHI members had a

one-stop shop for messaging via CCHI's social media campaign and were able to integrate CCHI materials into both social and traditional media, such as brochures, flyers, letters to the editor and more. By the end of the campaign, CCHI observed those messages being used by legislators and other audiences reached by CCHI members.

» CCHI Sample Tweet

"Coloradans should be able to get the care that they need when they need it. That is on our #coleg #wishlist." (1/9/13)

Incite Action

Social media can support public engagement and motivate collective action. Although a large share of social media content is active and individually created, passive online engagement, such as sharing, reposting, voting or "liking," can also engage people. Nearly 60 percent of Twitter content is shared or retweeted material, meaning almost 35 million tweets per day represent this more passive use of the social media site.² Even encouraging your audience to take action by sharing or reposting content has significant potential for expanding audience reach and raising awareness.

However, in order for any advocacy or public will-building campaign to be successful, individuals should be inspired to take further action in their communities or with decision-makers. Social media can be an effective way to announce events, share information about activities in different locations and provide an accessible mechanism for writing letters or contacting legislators or other decision-makers. The PHC evaluation found that the most active social media or online participants engaged in the campaign also took offline action. In this regard, it is important that taking action is as easy as possible for your audience through engagement in a user-friendly, highly interactive format.

For example, the Get Healthy SLV! website included content contributed by local high school students engaged in a service learning project. Content posted by students was frequently viewed by the community at large, and the project capitalized on that interest by accompanying the students' content with easy online and offline ways to take action, such as attending community events (which were well-attended).

The Colorado Children's Campaign and Children's Hospital Colorado social media campaigns were even more interactive. Both organizations used their social media campaigns to support individuals learning to advocate at the state capitol by providing training videos with talking points and role-playing; videos showing other people's experiences speaking with legislators; and live tweets from the capitol during an all-day training.

Integrate Media Strategies

The last step to developing a powerful social media campaign is to integrate social media with broader media and advocacy activities. Ideally, social media isn't a parallel aspect of an advocacy campaign; instead, it is deeply connected with all parts of the work. Strong communications strategies allow for integrated platforms so that websites link to Facebook, Twitter and other social media, while website and social media platforms include links to articles, resources and other materials distributed by an organization. Remember, however, that social media is not a place to broadcast anything and everything about your organization's activities and events; rather, it should be engaging and interactive.

Several of the grantees found that an integrated social media strategy allowed for greater audience reach, as they were better able to direct traffic to important issues and events. For example, 9Health Fair shared news stories, information and resources via their social media page, supporting their partnership with 9News. Simultaneously, 9News promoted the 9Health Fair through traditional media channels. CCHI used sample social media posts in their newsletters while redirecting members to important resources and information. Colorado HealthStory posted stories on Facebook and redirected audiences to their home page for more specific information about their project and mission. Each of these grantees reported increases in online traffic and attendance at their events once their social media efforts gathered momentum.

The Five "I"s in Action

The PHC Facebook page served as an avenue for expanding audience reach, raising awareness and building conviction through social media while allowing for interaction among users responding to each other's comments and posting viewpoints.

PHC *initiated the conversation*, encouraging their audience to "like," share or comment on Facebook posts. While the tone of audience comments was mixed, they were clearly active and engaged. Individuals shared personal stories and their feelings about health care access issues. They also reported taking actions, such as talking to health providers, contacting legislators or sharing information in their communities, and encouraged others to do the same.

PHC kept an *interested* audience through diverse content, featuring videos, images, informational stories, links and paid posts. There was evidence of repeat participation (participants posting multiple times across multiple days). One paid post in particular resulted in more than 25,000 likes, 690 shares and 1,800 comments.

Interested audience members were *influenced* by what they were engaging with on the PHC page. Nearly half of the Facebook exchanges were helpful and positive, and reinforced messages to other users. Twenty-one percent of the comments included a personal story, highlighting a health care situation or need that an individual was facing. These personal stories were often used to drive home a message about why an individual supported or opposed health care reform, or to make a counter-argument to another comment.¹⁴

The PHC Facebook page also *incited* further actions, including individuals asking a question, offering a health care solution that might be applicable to other Facebook members or calling on others to take some action. Particularly in the context of how to get access to affordable care, individual users were willing to share solutions that they were personally aware of or make suggestions for how health care might work better for all Coloradans.

Finally, the PHC Facebook page was *integrated* within the broader media campaign strategy, with traditional media as well as the website directing traffic to their social media channels and vice versa. As a comprehensive package, the media and mobilization campaign for PHC was an integrated component of the overall strategy.

» CONCLUSION

Social media represents a powerful communication tool for any advocacy campaign. When used to its full potential, social media can inform and engage audiences in an active dialogue, motivating individuals to take real action on behalf of an issue. In order to be most effective in harnessing the power of social media, consider the five “I”s:

- **INITIATE THE CONVERSATION:** Be edgy; post content that will start a conversation. Push the envelope and challenge your audience to get involved and make their voices heard.
- **INTEREST YOUR AUDIENCE:** Share information that is useful to your audience. Stories are an important tool for this—share a story that informs and is personally engaging.
- **INFLUENCE YOUR AUDIENCE:** User-generated content and discussion can influence individuals in many ways, creating greater impact than content alone.
- **INCITE ACTION IN YOUR AUDIENCE:** Provide an avenue for further action, either online or in person, and allow for people to share their stories.
- **INTEGRATE MEDIA STRATEGIES:** Make the content work with your communications strategy and integrate every aspect of communications. Social media isn’t just the outsider, “fun” part of the campaign; it is every bit as powerful as traditional forms of communication.

In this era of information overload, advocacy campaigns need to rise above the noise to reach their target audiences. As social media is becoming increasingly ubiquitous, a unique opportunity exists to engage the public through informed, interactive, user-driven content while simultaneously guiding the dialogue, delivering key messages, influencing stakeholders and inciting action. By paying careful attention to social media strategies and integrating them into every aspect of public campaigning, online engagement with target audiences can be a powerful tool for advocates.

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Visit the following websites or email the contact person for more information about Project Health Colorado and the grantee organizations featured in this report:

Project Health Colorado: www.projecthealthcolorado.org, Scott Downes, scott@coloradotrust.org

Colorado Children’s Campaign: www.coloradokids.org, Jacy Montoya-Price, jacy@coloradokids.org

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative: www.cohealthinitiative.org, Adam Fox, afox@cohealthinitiative.org

Colorado HealthStory: www.coloradohealthstory.org, Alicia Haywood, ah@coruralhealth.org

Children’s Hospital Colorado: www.childrenscolorado.org, Erika Zierke, erika.zierke@childrenscolorado.org

9Health Fair: www.9healthfair.org, Jim Goddard, jim.goddard@9healthfair.org

Spark Policy Institute partners with communities, policymakers, leaders and the general public to find solutions to complex policy problems. The combination of community- and stakeholder-driven research with practical, hands-on experience in the policy systems allows for solutions that bridge across sectors, policy issues, levels of government and diverse beliefs and values. Spark served as the evaluators and real-time strategic learning coaches for Project Health Colorado. To learn more about Spark Policy Institute, visit www.sparkpolicy.com, email info@sparkpolicy.com or call 303-455-1740.

» ENDNOTES

- ¹ The terms “clicktivism” and “slacktivism” as defined in this brief are now commonly accepted terms for passive engagement in social causes. The term “clicktivism” was added to The Collins English Dictionary in 2011, and “slacktivism” was added to The Oxford English Dictionary in 2010.
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- ¹² Smith T. The social media revolution. Int J Market Res. 2008;51(4):559-562.
- ¹³ Promoted posts are a paid social media strategy on Facebook, in contrast to user-generated content or more organically developing shared or posted materials.



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