Social Media tools have expanded how non-profit professionals and organizations network. These tools allow you to reach a broader audience, create organizational visibility, and can be used to generate revenue. Whether you call it social media, Web 2.0, online platforms or collaborative technology, these tools are valuable assets that non-profits should be familiar with. This article examines how specific tools can be used to achieve results in networking and fundraising.

The Internet has enabled conversations to occur among people in new ways. We have evolved from our print media to the current digital landscape. New forms of social organization and knowledge exchange have emerged with social media. Our ability to communicate one-to-many has expanded further into many-to-many. Social media is similar to traditional media in that they both require a clearly defined organizational brand. You must identify and understand your communication objectives. You also must identify your target audience and craft your message accordingly.

However, social media is not a spectator sport. It is designed around participation. Participation leads to conversation, which leads to the development of community. Within a community, you have opportunities to collaborate and develop a collective intelligence. Collective intelligence shapes and changes social media, policies and systems.

According to a recent study by the NonProfit Times, “only 58 percent of non-profits use social media for fundraising. Sharing their story, building a community, public relations and donor engagement/retention – not raising funds – were listed as the nonprofits’ top reasons for engaging in social media”.

Other significant findings included:
- 88 percent of respondents use some form of social media but more than half of them have been using social media for less than a year;
- 46 percent of respondents that have not adopted social media cited a lack of time and resources and 33 percent cited a lack of understanding and expertise;
- 45 percent of respondents that have not adopted social media are unsure of the relevance and advantages to their organization;
- The most popular types of social media used are widely-adopted social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, followed by blogging ad micro-blogging. YouTube is also widely used.
- 70 percent recognize social media as either very or somewhat important to their organization, while only 9 percent are very satisfied; and
- 20 percent of respondents spend more than five hours per week using social media.

For the non-profit community, social media has presented unique opportunities to expand its fundraising strategies. By design, social media exposes people to new organizations and enables them to support social causes in a manner that is comfortable with them.

Although online donations are growing in general, organizations are still trying to link their social media strategies to their fundraising strategies. While in a weak economy, the number of high level donors...
may have shrunk, new and expanded technology has given non-profits access to a potentially very large constituency of lower level donors that are unconstrained by geography, time-zone, and traditional outreach obstacles.

Today’s donors are far different than the donors most nonprofits have been accustomed to. They have grown up in the age of technology, video games and the Internet. These donors are used to always being accessible, having access to information electronically whenever desired and receiving information fast.

The cost-effectiveness of traditional strategies such as email campaigns and appeals has long been proven. Nonprofits need to adapt their mentality and transform their fundraising and communication strategies to include more frequent interactions and incorporate high-tech methods. Non-profits can communicate more frequently and in a variety of manners that is expected by recipients.

Social media has only begun to change the way non-profits do business. Many opportunities exist for the industry to integrate social media into its daily routine. Whether it is communicating with stakeholders, organizing an event, documenting an accomplishment or raising funds, non-profits now have multiple options to rally support. Like most new strategies, it is important not to underestimate the amount of time, knowledge and resources needed to implement such changes. Don’t let restrictions in time and resources deter your efforts. Making the upfront investment and committing to maintain these changes will ensure that you get the most of out your efforts. With the profile of a typical supporter of social causes changing, not participating is no longer an option.

We have outlined several popular social media sites to consider:

**Facebook**:
Facebook is a social networking site. Users can add friends, send them messages, update their personal profiles, join networks and use applications such as “Causes on Facebook”.

Non-profits can create a profile and use the network to add “friends” to the organization. You can ask friends to support your “Causes on Facebook”. This allows you to communicate your mission and market your services. You can use your profile to show number of members, seek donations, track the amount donated, track funds raised by particular members, refer friends, make personal fundraising pledges and much more.
MySpace:
MySpace is a social networking site. Users can provide updates on moods, blurbs, blogs, bulletins, music, etc.

Non-profits can create a profile and use the network to add “friends” to the organization. MySpace is used more frequently for personal use, rather than for business purposes.

Twitter:
Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages, referred to as “tweets”. Tweets are text-based posts that are displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s followers. Micro-blogging is a form of blogging that allows users to send and publish brief text updates, such as photos and/or audio clips.

For non-profits, some recommendations on how to use Twitter include:
1. Build community – Look for people to add to your community and create a virtual community of people with common interests
2. Engage – Form relationships, converse with stakeholders, post interesting links, etc. Pay attention to what your followers Tweet.
3. Be transparent – Don’t hide who you are, identify yourself. People want to know that they are speaking to real people.
4. Don’t advertise or market – Let it happen naturally in conversation.
5. Develop guidelines for conversation – Create consistent messaging guidelines to assist in branding.
6. On-line criticism is an opportunity – Take the opportunity to avert open public relations issues.
7. Stay on top of technical developments – Third party applications are available that can improve the efficiency and functionality of site.
8. Have fun – Unlike the board room, this is a place to reveal a piece of you and show a human side.
Flickr:
Flickr is an image and video hosting website. Users share and embed personal photographs in blogs and social network sites.

Non-Profits can use Flickr to share photos from events, special projects, document progress on a capital campaigns, highlight sponsorships, spotlight a success story, etc.

YouTube:
YouTube is a video sharing website. Users can upload and share videos with others.

Non-profits can use YouTube to record special events, document testimony from stakeholders, make an appeal for your fundraising campaign, and much more.

LinkedIn:
LinkedIn is a business oriented social networking site primarily used for professional networking.

LinkedIn provides a focused method of networking within the non-profit industry. Non-profit leaders would benefit from creating a profile and developing connections to other experts and leaders in the field. Consequently, having a profile provides another avenue to promote the work of the organization and meet other professional in the field that may be interested in volunteering, serving as Board members or donating to the cause.
www.ping.fm

Ping.fm:
Ping.fm is a social networking and micro-blogging web service that enables users to post to multiple social networks simultaneously. Making an update on Ping.fm pushes the updates to a number of different social websites at once. This allows individuals using multiple social networks to update their status only once. You can update in three categories: status updates, blogs, and micro-blogs.

References:

Additional Social Media Resources:

www.smartbrief.com/socialmedia  (Free daily briefing newsletter on social media)

Third Party Twitter Tools:
www.brizzly.com
www.hootsuite.com
www.twitpic.com
www.twitteranalyzer.com

"Here Comes Everybody” by Clay Shirky

"Trust Agents” by Chris Bogman & Julien Smith

“Socialnomics” by Erik Qualman