Freshen up your Facebook Presence through Creative Thinking!

Facebook is one of the most well known social media and online networking platforms, known for its quick text updates and image display feature. If your organization invests a little time and creative thinking, Facebook can provide a rich experience for your organization’s audience through innovative uses of the platform’s many secondary networking features.

Why does creativity matter?

With millions of users posting new content daily, it’s important to help your organization’s presence not only retain the Facebook audience it already has but to also stand out from other organizations’ pages. And that’s where fresh thinking can help.

Fresh thinking is nothing more than new ideas or new perspectives. These practices can increase the potential for opportunities by differentiating your organization from others. Standing out from the crowd will draw attention to your efforts; once people are paying attention to your organization’s activities, you can engage them in ways that will keep their attention over time.

How to be creative with Facebook

Facebook has many networking features that can complement the better known text update and image posting capabilities. We will discuss how text updates can be used creatively and explore other features that can accent your organization’s online networking efforts. Let’s start with how to use text updates in new and interesting ways.

Text Updates

Text updates are the most popular activity on Facebook. They appear on a page’s wall, which is more often than not the selected home page where visitors land after clicking on an organization’s Facebook username. Members can also post comments to a text update. Often times, it seems that a lot of Facebook pages use this feature to post the latest news or information of the day. While this practice works, it does not directly engage the audience in a meaningful way. So when using this feature, consider how to use your updates to create a stronger connection with your program’s Facebook page visitors.

For example, consider posting a testimonial submitted by one of your program’s participants. Your target audience will want to see the benefits and results of your program’s efforts so a real-life account could draw their attention and maintain their interest. And since text updates can be made on a regular basis, these personal accounts could create a real connection between your organization’s efforts and its audience. Another way to use text updates could be to pose questions directly to your audience that address current program issues or that elicit feedback or suggestions that might help your program;
examples could be “What are some strategies for effective after-school programming?” or “What motivated you to pursue post-secondary education?”.

Chat

The chat feature is a great way to engage your audience on a more direct, interactive level. The chat feature functions in much the same way as instant messaging or text messaging in that comments are displayed line by line in a conversation format. You can also create groups within your chat screen so your organization’s Facebook audience can be organized in whatever way you feel is helpful.

As a creative use of Facebook, the chat feature can be used to contact anyone who is a friend or fan of your organization’s Facebook page. It could serve as a one-on-one means of outreach in regards to any type of idea, issue, or follow-up that is needed with your audience. For example, you could establish set hours every day or week when a staff member from your organization could be available to take questions or comments through the chat feature. A follower of your organization’s Facebook page could potentially chat with your program directly and address specific issues that pertain to them, whether they are suggestions for your efforts or questions in regards to their own efforts as they relate to your work.

Tagging

Tagging is one way to interact with a Facebook page’s content. This function allows you to mention content that your organization is connected to. It displays it in a way that allows others to interact with the original publisher, regardless of whether it’s an individual Facebook member page or organization’s fan page. You can tag a profile, page, group, event, or photo; anyone who views your post can click through to view the original publisher.

How could the tagging feature creatively serve your organization’s networking needs? Tagging could help by displaying your connection to the pages of organizations you are partnered with. It could link to relevant content that highlights your work with that organization or it could help promote that partner. Tagging could also allow your audience to see relevant content of other organizations you work with in order to help broaden their perspective on the work you do. It could also show how connected your organization is to comparable efforts and how willing you are to work together towards a common goal.

Tabs for Events and Correspondence

The tab feature allows you to add various elements to your page that could enhance the interaction between your organization and its audience. You can use tabs for event promotion and sign up, or you can use it to facilitate communication with your audience.

The events tab is a great way to display and invite your organization’s events to your Facebook audience. Event pages are linked to your organization’s Facebook page and can contain an organization or event logo, photos, and video as well as a comment section. This feature holds great potential to generate interest and participation in your organization’s activities. For example, let’s say your Youthbuild program is hosting an event that invites construction business owners from the local community to meet graduating youth who are looking for employment after they complete the program. Your organization could create a Facebook event that would provide background information on the event as well as a way for those interested in attending to RSVP through Facebook that they will
attend. This could help you determine the potential turnout as well as the diversity of people attending, or identify the need to continue recruiting or outreach.

Using tabs for correspondence will give your audience an easy way to stay in touch with your organization. It’s a great alternative to manually creating email lists or using Facebook direct messages. These types of tabs can display an email sign-up feature or a mailing list sign-up feature; both will allow your audience to feel as if their contact information is being collected effectively and professionally.

**Twitter integration**

Facebook allows users to connect their Facebook profile or organization fan page to their Twitter account. This feature is displayed on a Facebook page as a tab; when visited, all of your Twitter updates and profile information appear. This feature can be used to give your audience a well rounded experience with your organization and program. It could also allow you to reserve your Facebook text updates for more interesting and creative purposes. For example, your organization could create a Twitter account that is solely used for program-related announcements. Once the Twitter tab is added, you can use your Facebook text updates for program testimonials, audience feedback requests, or some other engaging use that could better connect your audience with your organization and program.

**How to develop new ways to use Facebook**

These are just a few suggested ways to use the various networking features within Facebook. However, it’s important to always work towards developing your own ideas so that your organization’s long-term Facebook presence can be as valuable and resourceful for your audience as possible. But how do you develop new, creative ways to use this online networking platform?

**Look to your audience**

Identify their needs, interests, and concerns. Understand why they are involved with your organization and how your Facebook presence can enhance that. This is important because without your audience, your Facebook presence doesn’t matter; the people who interact with your Facebook page are vital in determining how to best serve them.

**Try to do what others are not doing**

Your organization and Youthbuild program are made up of individuals. Each individual has their own skills and experiences that they bring to the work that’s done in your program. Therefore, it’s important to reflect that sense of uniqueness by keeping your Facebook presence fresh. Don’t do what others are doing: try to take the various features within the platform and use them in new and interesting ways that can complement your program staff and youth. Use these features in ways that help your program attract positive attention and retain the loyalty of interested, dedicated people and organizations.

**Be open-minded**

Your program’s Facebook networking efforts cannot be maintained or progress if you are not willing to look for new opportunities to engage with your audience. In order to best do that, keep an open mind and be willing to consider new ideas. While it may seem difficult at first, considering new ideas could lead to stronger audience engagement and a more rich online networking experience.
Examples of Youthbuild-related Facebook pages

Program: YouthBuild Rockford
URL: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Rockford-IL/YouthBuild-Rockford/322642840923?created
Example of an interesting feature: mailing list sign-up tab

Program: ReSource Vermont
URL: http://www.facebook.com/resourcevt
Example of an interesting feature: email sign-up tab

Program: Northeast Parent Child and Society
URL: http://www.facebook.com/neparentchild
Example of an interesting feature: events tab
Facebook is a dynamic online networking platform that employs a variety of features that can be used creatively to better engage your audience and provide a more meaningful user experience. While Facebook is known for its text update and image features, there are quite a few additional features that can be used creatively to reinforce a program’s efforts. Some examples include text and image tagging, a quick chat feature, and Twitter integration. Since these features are just examples, it is important to look at Facebook as a whole in order to determine the best features to use, how to use them, and how they can strengthen the relationships and experiences that your audience has with your organization and program. And once you implement one or more creative ideas into your Facebook efforts, it’s important to regularly review the Facebook features and functions that are at your disposal so you can maintain an effective engagement practice.

Creativity is important when you’re communicating valuable information and building long-term online relationships with an audience. By being creative, you can ensure thorough engagement that will support a rich relationship between your audience and your organization.