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GET CONNECTED

Five ways to make social media work

The popularity of the Internet as a viable, primary source for news, information and staying connected continues to grow each day. Establishing a social-media presence for a camp business is not only necessary but crucial in communicating with the public. Instead of spending time, energy and money on getting a message out through traditional print media, social media connects with an audience instantaneously.



The question is how to maximize a social-media presence. Familiar platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as lesser-known platforms like YouTube and Flickr, serve different audiences as well as provide different types of content. Knowing which platform is most relevant for your message is a key component to success; keeping each audience updated regularly is a must. Here are five simple ways to obtain the most from social media:

1. Promote Your Programs

Promotion might be the easiest way to get started in social media, and done well, may be more efficient and cost-effective than using traditional methods. Promotion encompasses everything from bringing in potential campers and involving parents to populating staff rosters and enlisting possible donors, partners and other supporters. With social media, cross-promotional posts guarantee interested folks immediate access to the elusive “more information” they need. For

instance, instead of sending a print newsletter with camp-registration forms, feature a link on your Facebook page to the online version. But don't fall into the trap of thinking that your work is finished by promoting via Facebook and Twitter—readers want to connect with information, not just receive online junk mail. Focus on strategies that build around promotional efforts rather than just tossing out promotional materials and updates. One of the best ways to build that audience is through conversation.

2. Creating Conversation

There's a reason for “social” in social media—people want to feel a connection, to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They seek meaningful relationships with those who share the same interest or passion. Using social media for promotion presupposes that the content/promotion is relevant to users' lives, so the question is: what value do social-media posts offer our audience?

Creating conversation—like posing a question or posting links to content most relevant to an audience, or asking for feedback and maintaining some interaction—will build interest in your business at an integral, basic level. Give people not only a reason to converse but a reason to return to the website. If possible, work in links to current news that has relevance to the business, lifestyle or social importance of camp. Chances are that if the content is meaningful for one reader, it will be worth the time to share, increasing your social-media presence by simply meeting an audience on its terms.

3. Customize Content

Parents looking for registration information are likely to have different questions than those of potential staff members. Likewise, camp-business colleagues and donors have a different perspective than do past campers. While it seems a large investment of time, creating individual Facebook pages and separate Twitter accounts is one of the most



SOCIAL MEDIA

is media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein also define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” Businesses also refer to social media as consumer-generated media (CGM). A common thread running through all definitions of social media is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value. *Wikipedia*

powerful ways to tailor content to specific groups. Ideas include specific FAQs for each group, application links, registration information, camp policies and procedures, general updates, deadlines and other applicable material. For campers—often more technologically savvy and passionate about their camp experience—create group photo albums via a Flickr account, then use a widget to show them as a slide show. Invite links to personal blogs on camp-related posts and camp videos, or even create an archival-type section where users can add and share camp stories (“Notes” on Facebook pages are ideal for this.) Encourage each year’s group of campers to continue the tradition once they return home. Share some of the more poignant stories, photos and videos on the parent page to give them an appreciation for their children’s camp experience. The same meaningful content can enhance a staff page, where programming and alumni-association details may be of interest.

4. Invite Opinions

Online survey sites—such as surveymonkey.com and zoomerang.com—aren’t technically considered social-media sites by themselves, but they can be a valuable asset to engaging an

audience while providing valuable feedback for future efforts. Consider a monthly survey on any relevant aspect of the camp business for particular groups. Keep surveys short for best results, and always include an option for additional thoughts where possible. Survey content can comprise anything from programming ideas to dietary considerations to education sessions—anything where feedback can be considered. Humans are innately wired to give their opinions when asked. That feedback can come free of charge—all while keeping your audience engaged.

5. Build Community With Colleagues

Facebook and Twitter are different from LinkedIn, in that the former are more geared toward sharing information with a large group instantaneously. Though LinkedIn content is much less interactive, it has enormous potential to build interest and create community at a professional level. Some ways to use LinkedIn to promote a camp include:

- Finding potential investors, sponsors or other professional-level sources of funding
- Sharing knowledge and expertise with the camping community

- Building and strengthening online industry-network relationships.

The initial investment of time and resources required to build a social-media presence may seem great, but establishing an online community will get your message out in a more timely, economical and tailored manner. Connecting and building relationships are necessities in today’s business world. Using social media will help maximize your online networking and social-media presence, and translate into real results. **CB**

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