



Achieve Critical Mass in Your Marketing Efforts

By Timothy S. Jacobson
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Physicists have taught us an important lesson for the age of social media networking: achieve critical mass to create explosive results.

A nuclear reaction cannot be sustained unless the reactor or the bomb contains a critical mass of fuel. If the quantity of plutonium or uranium is too small, there won't be a chain reaction of neutrons splitting atoms, which knocks other neutrons loose which, in turn, splits more atoms, which knocks more neutrons loose ... until the reaction becomes explosive.

Our social networking world for marketing functions in a similar way to a nuclear reactor. Sure, you can split some atoms with less than critical mass. Likewise, you can get some people to notice your marketing efforts with less than critical mass. But your marketing efforts won't become a self-sustaining frenzy of attention unless you achieve critical mass.

Videos that go "viral" on the Internet are a great example of achieving critical mass, although this tends to happen accidentally (or sometimes by being bold enough to post marketing videos that are explosively catchy).

Another way to look at this is the concept of building self-sustaining online communities. If you can get enough people interested and connected through your social media vehicles, they can sustain and extend the buzz of your marketing efforts by creating discussions and engaging their own groups of friends, which can lead to logarithmic growth of connections for your organization.

How does one apply these general principles to the functioning of an understaffed and underfunded nonprofit organization, you may be wondering.

Take a look at the social media vehicles in your marketing arsenal. How many are you using? Do you have a Facebook page but not a Twitter account? Are your staff members on LinkedIn, and do they use it to market the organization's work as well as themselves? Does your group have it's own YouTube channel? How about a blog?

It amazes me how many well-established nonprofit organizations out there--I'm talking groups with operating budgets of a half-million dollars or more--still limp along online with only a website, as if it was 1999.

You may be thinking that even if you had these channels of communication/interaction in place, you wouldn't have time to utilize them. But think: how easy would it be to copy posts from one social media vehicle and paste it into another? It's darn easy. You can even find online services that will automate the process, although I recommend cross-posting by hand so you can make little tweaks to customize the presentation of information to the end user.

Now, look at how many "likes" or followers you have on your social media platforms. If the number is small, you're obviously not achieving critical mass. There are several ways to crank up the numbers of people following your organization online. One of the easiest methods is to purchase ads to promote your presence. Facebook and Twitter make this easy and inexpensive. The best part of social media ads is that you can target your ads to people with very specific interests and demographics, and you receive very detailed reports on who you're reaching. For a couple hundred dollars, you may be able to double, triple or quadruple the number of people following your organization online.

Time your social media advertising to coincide with some other activity. Perhaps tie it into an online contest or a crowdfunding campaign to drive more people to the site where they can donate to your cause. This can be amazingly effective.

For example, I launched a Facebook ad for a local nonprofit at the same time that the group was engaged in a crowdrise.com fundraising challenge. The organization spent maybe \$300 or a little more on the ad, but they quadrupled their Facebook following, raised more than \$10,000 and beat several huge national organizations involved in the same fundraising challenge.

In future segments, we'll examine the variety of social media outlets to build your organization's reach. But for the time being, start by setting up accounts on at least a couple new social media sites and make a few posts. There is absolutely nothing to lose on these free sites, and there's a huge amount of upside potential.

Do it. Today!



Tim Jacobson is president of Visjonær Consulting & Communications, LLC. He's been a board member and executive of a number of nonprofit and for-profit organizations over the past two decades. He's the author of a novel "The Kurchatov Penetration" and executive producer of a documentary film, "Mysteries of the Driftless," slated for broadcast on public television. His communications work has garnered awards, both national and international, for excellence.

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