Pitching Purpose: Digital Marketing for Social Good

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University Honors, Spring 2013
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ABSTRACT

Within the last five years, the field of marketing has been completely transformed by the emergence and refinement of new web technologies. It is now faster and simpler than ever for individuals to find highly customized content while also making contributions back into their respective areas of interest. Most importantly, they can do so unburdened by timing, distance, or national borders.

With a continuous need of funding and grassroots support, cause-driven organizations are particularly well positioned to benefit from this shift, yet surprisingly few have managed to effectively leverage digital marketing techniques. Many nonprofits have historically viewed marketing as a wasteful activity that distracts from "saving the world," failing to realize that these new technologies are more measurable, cost-effective, and adaptable than their predecessors. With the full arsenal of digital tools now available, these organizations can easily and organically engage their supporters to fuel fundraising and humanitarian efforts.

This capstone evaluates the most common digital marketing methods, focusing most heavily on the power of social media to build and sustain movements. It then applies these best practices to two case studies analyzing the digital marketing efforts of both Invisible Children's Kony 2012 campaign and of the "benefit corporation" Warby Parker. By employing these strategies, cause-driven organizations can most efficiently overcome budget constraints, emotional distance, and other hurdles to their success.

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INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to sell an idea? Can you "pitch" purpose? Compassion? Empathy? The answer to all of these is *yes*. In fact, the entire field of cause marketing is dedicated to the premise that the masses can be enticed into political or charitable action in much the same way that they might be emotionally drawn to Coke over Pepsi.

Within the last five years, the field of marketing has been completely transformed by the emergence and refinement of new web technologies. It is now faster and simpler than ever for individuals to find highly customized content while also making contributions back into their respective areas of interest. Most importantly, they can do so unburdened by timing, distance, or national borders. With a continuous need of funding and grassroots support, cause-driven organizations are particularly well positioned to benefit from this shift, yet surprisingly few have managed to effectively leverage digital marketing techniques. Many nonprofits have historically viewed marketing as a wasteful activity that distracts from "saving the world," failing to realize that these new technologies are more measurable, cost-effective, and adaptable than their predecessors. With the arsenal of digital tools now available, these organizations can easily and organically engage their supporters to fuel fundraising and humanitarian efforts.

This capstone analyzes the most common digital marketing methods, focusing most heavily on the power of social media to build and sustain movements. It then applies these best practices to two case studies analyzing the digital marketing efforts of Invisible Children's Kony 2012 campaign and those of the "Benefit Corporation" Warby Parker. By employing these strategies, cause-driven organizations can most efficiently overcome budget constraints, emotional distance, and other hurdles to their success.

LOST OPPORTUNITY

In *Social Entrepreneurship: A Modern Approach to Social Value Creation*, Arthur Brooks points out that marketing in the private, for-profit sector is driven by a principle economists call equimarginality. This means that companies should continue to spend on marketing until the last dollar of expenditure brings in exactly one dollar of revenue—essentially, the break even point. The justification for this strategy is that up until the point of equimarginality, spending *more* on marketing will still have a positive return on investment and increase the company's earnings. This makes sense financially and is an idea that underlies much of modern economics.[1]

Despite the clear economic logic behind the principle, equimarginality has never gained much traction in the social sector. The conventional wisdom is that low costs serve the "higher good," and a dollar spent on marketing is a dollar not spent on charitable programs. We, as donors, like to see our money go directly to the needy, and organizations that invest more than a minimal amount in employee compensation or marketing are derided as “wasteful” and “inefficient.” In his book *Uncharitable: How Restraints on Nonprofits Undermine Their Potential*, fundraising expert Dan Pallotta addresses this stigma.[2]

Pallotta explains that the “Puritan-inspired construction” of self-deprivation that drives nonprofits’ budgets wrongly puts the focus on short-term rather than long-term outcomes. Yes, a dollar spent on marketing today could have been spent on a program for the needy, but then “the needy would always be there, because charity will never find a way to generate the resources it would take to eradicate their need.”[3] As Pallotta points out in “Why Can’t We Sell Charity Like We Sell Perfume?,” cause-driven organizations must learn from their profit-driven counterparts and treat marketing as a necessary investment rather than a superfluous overhead cost. Case in point: Share Our Strength, a charitable organization focused on ending child hunger, began investing substantially into its marketing and fundraising efforts in 2010. Two years later, the $30 million organization was a $43 million organization.[4]

However, one organization’s marketing success story does not necessarily translate perfectly to other organizations with different missions, structures, or audiences, and therein lies the next hurdle. In *Uncharitable*, Pallotta mentions a 2007 report by Forrester Research that found that “seventy-six percent of marketers had no way to determine their return on investment from their lead [advertising] agencies,” and

> *“Why can’t we sell charity like we sell perfume?” –Dan Pallotta*

“sixty-nine percent said ROI is too difficult to measure.” Pallotta somewhat feebly counters this statistic by suggesting that marketing clearly works, otherwise, American companies would not spend almost a trillion dollars a year doing it.[5] While there is sound logic to this statement, few nonprofits would be able to convince their boards and donors that this is satisfactory justification for a lack of accountability.

Thankfully, there is a solution to this problem. Digital marketing is perhaps one of the most measurable, cost effective, and fluid tools available to organizations looking to promote a social cause. In the subsequent sections, I explain point by point why cause-driven organizations are uniquely poised to benefit from digital marketing. I then proceed to discuss best practices for execution, and I apply my analysis to case studies of Invisible Children’s Kony 2012 campaign and the rapid growth of Warby Parker.

THE ADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing is a relatively young and rapidly developing subcategory of marketing. It includes all forms of internet-based marketing, as well as the offline components of marketing on digital devices, and is typically divided into several key areas. These are:

- Website development
- Search engine optimization[1]
- Paid advertising[2]
- Email marketing
- Social media

In our increasingly "plugged in" and multitasking society, traditional marketing, while still important, can no longer carry the torch on its own. A study released by KPMG earlier this year found that 60% of American television viewers are surfing the Internet while watching TV.[6] This is just one poignant example of the challenges now facing marketers and advertisers in our increasingly digital world. Instead of prompting a trip to the store, running an ad on television is now much more likely to trigger a Google search for the advertised product, service, or cause. And that is if the aforementioned ad manages to pique the interest of its distracted viewer. In a more likely scenario, the viewer would probably see that the show is on a commercial break and immediately redirect his or her attention to chatting on Facebook, catching up on emails, or reading an article a friend shared on Twitter.[7]

While it will certainly take time for marketers to fully adjust, this should be a welcome shift for cause-driven organizations. First, digital marketing is *significantly* less expensive than its traditional counterparts. It requires no financial investment to set up a blog or Twitter account, and for tools that do come with a price tag, the nearly limitless potential audience can make the cost per viewer nearly negligible. Perhaps most memorably, Pepsi passed up running $3 million-per-spot television advertisements during the 2010 Super Bowl in favor of a social media campaign to promote its Pepsi Refresh project. Through the initiative, the company planned to donate $20 million in grant money to fund humanitarian organizations. Fearing that spending extravagantly on advertising would detract from the charitable message, Pepsi opted for the cheaper alternative: social media.[8] In addition to saving organizations money, the rise of digital marketing has also leveled the playing field for smaller companies and nonprofit organizations that could not previously afford pricey television ads or direct mail campaigns.[9]

As I alluded to earlier, digital marketing is also extraordinarily measurable. It is now possible to determine not only if a user viewed a page online, but also how they arrived at that page, when and how long they looked at it, and whether or not they later took action by making a purchase, signing up for a newsletter, or making a donation.

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[1] Search engine optimization (SEO) is the ultimate way of to put your cause in front of your target market *at the exact moment* they are looking for related information. The SEO strategies that cause-driven organizations should employ are no different from those of profit-driven companies, and for that reason, I do not delve into the topic here. For more information, Google, the king of search, has a search engine optimization starter guide and other resources available publicly online.[1]

[2] For similar reasons, I also do not address paid advertising at length in this report. The fundamentals of paid advertising strategy are identical for cause-driven organizations and profit-driven business. By nature of being paid, cost could also be a prohibitive factor for many smaller organizations with limited budgets.

Marketers can even track the success of different subject lines in getting a recipient to open an email or find out what time of day their followers on Twitter are most likely to retweet a post to their friends. A technique called A-B testing also allows organizations to simultaneously launch multiple versions of web pages, emails, or other tools with isolated changes to discover which version was more successful in eliciting a desired response. Perhaps most importantly, they can do all this and use the results to *continuously tweak and improve their digital marketing efforts*. The beauty of digital is that constant adjustments, redesigns, and strategy changes can all be accomplished quickly and at little to no cost. As previously mentioned, because nonprofits' funding often comes with strict standards for producing measurable results, the accountability that percolates through every aspect of digital marketing is more palatable to donors and grantors.

This also introduces the next point: timeliness. Web technologies, especially social media, allow for swift and immediate reactions to real-time events. In times of natural disaster, the Red Cross can tweet live updates of its relief and recovery efforts. The International Rescue Committee can email out a call for donations amidst a flaring international conflict. Human Rights Watch can update its homepage to reflect an update on a case it has been monitoring. There is no longer a delay between breaking news and cause-driven organizations' calls to action, enabling these groups to capitalize on empathy and novelty before compassion fatigue sets in.[10]

What might be the most unique aspect of digital marketing is its ability to "broaden the scope of your marketing reach and narrow its focus *at the same time*."[11] The Internet can transcend time zones, distance, and even political borders, making it the most ubiquitous tool marketers have at their disposal. Organizations can now keep in contact with millions of people while simultaneously customizing each individual's experience to match his or her interests. This feature of digital marketing bodes extremely well for fundraising activities, which can now easily be tailored to be incredibly personal and relatable without a massive time investment. These types of highly targeted relationships with stakeholders are another way to break through indifference and tap into individuals' empathy.[12]

With this brief overview of digital marketing's advantages for cause-driven organizations, I will progress into a more in-depth analysis of each of its components. The following sections focus on compiling and analyzing best practices of cause-focused digital marketing from experts in the field. Where possible, I supplement these conclusions with real examples from organizations currently operating internationally.

A REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES

The Website

A cause-driven organization's website is one of the most important elements of its digital marketing arsenal. The website is home base. It is the "conversion engine" that turns clicks into donations and readers into activists. With a variety of web hosting options available for under $100 a year, it makes little sense that this is not an investment even a small organization would be willing to make. Failing to have a dedicated web presence means that you are leaving it up to others to disseminate information about the organization and cause.

That being said, having a webpage floating out in cyberspace without any clear purpose will do little for an organization. There is a considerable amount of planning and upkeep necessary for a website to be truly effective. First, it is necessary to establish clear goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). For a nonprofit, these could be "increase donations by 10% for the month of July" or "gain 1,000 new subscribers to our Take Action email program by September 30." These goals need to be clear, quantifiable, and easy to assess. Although many organizations have mistakenly thought otherwise, "raise awareness" is not an adequate or measurable goal for a website.[13]

Marketers agree on the importance of defining a target market for the site, considering how said audience will find the site online, and anticipating what they will be looking for when they eventually come across a landing page.[14] In the case of a political campaign, perhaps a constituent heard a statement on the news that they would like to fact check directly. For a nonprofit like the International Rescue Committee, a *New York Times* reader might come across the organization in an article discussing the Syrian refugee crisis and want to learn more. Researching these considerations within your target market and catching interest quickly is absolutely necessary: On average, 50% of incoming web surfers will "bounce," meaning that they never explore beyond the first landing page of a site.[15]

To keep users engaged, the absolute most important piece of your website is the content. In *Understanding Digital Marketing*, Damian Ryan and Calvin Jones outline key strategies for writing effective web content. First and foremost, they emphasize that writing should be concise and to the point. Above all, web users are extremely impatient. In a study from January 2011, Nielsen found that the average person spends less than one minute on a web page.[16] This means that organizations should strive to make text as scannable as possible—use lists, headers, simple language—and stick to the inverted pyramid style of journalistic writing. Users should be able to leave the page at any time and still take away the most important information. It is also helpful to keep to a conversational style and write "as if you were talking to an individual rather than an audience."[17] While this is true for most profit-driven companies, it is an especially useful strategy for cause-driven organizations. When appealing to a person's sympathies, beliefs, or interests, it makes sense to speak with him or her on a personal level.

Consistency is also essential to keep in mind, especially if more than one person will be writing for the site. Developing a style guide is a great way to ensure that the messaging is coherent.[18] Amnesty International employs strict a style guide in its online press releases and is an excellent model for other groups. Due to the sensitive nature of the human rights organization's work, careful and consistent phrasing is of the utmost importance. Each and every news release begins with "Amnesty International (fill in action verb)" and ends with a call to action. Sentences are kept relatively short, and there are strict guidelines on capitalization, punctuation, and proper terminology. For example, the Australia branch of Amnesty International lists in its style guide: "Avoid gender-biased terms and use more inclusive words, such as: people, humanity, human beings (not mankind), representative, spokesperson, chairperson, chair."[19] Humanitarian groups and political campaigns that deal with delicate topics must, like Amnesty, pay close attention to the tone of their online messaging and be consistent in their word choice.

A website with lackluster content is unlikely to capture the interest of a target market, yet even the best content can go to waste if a website is poorly designed. Web usability consultant Jakob Nielsen has identified several common design mistakes that make sites difficult for users to navigate. First, avoid anything that may look like an advertisement. Numerous studies have found that today's web users have "banner blindness," meaning they never focus on anything with a shape or position reminiscent of a banner ad. Pop-up windows are equally ineffective for the same reason. Violating design conventions can also make things difficult for users. For example, most users assume blue underlined text is a clickable link; if it is not, users may get confused, click on the text repeatedly, grow impatient, and leave your site. Even things as minor as not changing the color of visited links, having long blocks of text, or not having a search feature could be disorienting or frustrating enough to send users off to a competitor website. While entire books have been written on this topic, www.usability.gov and www.nngroup.com, Nielsen's own site, are excellent first resources for basic usability guidelines. When in doubt, keep things simple and make it easy for your users to access the content they seek.[20]

On the whole, cause-driven organizations should follow the same design and usability principles as any profit-driven business, but there are a few additional guidelines that cause-driven groups need to keep in mind. Most nonprofits and political campaigns survive on donations. Thus, you want to make it as easy as possible for users to send money. This means having a clear "Donate" button on the home page. User experience tests have shown that having this button in a starkly different color from the rest of the navigation is most successful.[21] As you can see in Figure 1, the World Wildlife Fund does an excellent job of drawing your focus to their "Donate" and "Adopt" buttons with pops of orange in an otherwise black and white navigation bar.

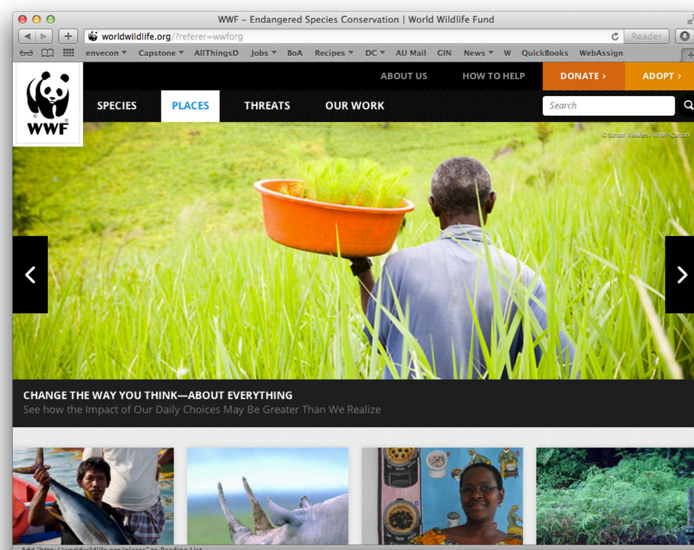

Figure 1: World Wildlife Fund Website

The landing page of Half the Sky, on the other hand, makes it more challenging for users to find the donation page. As displayed in Figure 2, users first have to hover over the “Take Action” link, wait for the drop down menu to appear, click “International Giving,” and *then* click the big, red “Donate Now” button. This is three steps too many—why test the patience and perseverance of potential donors? With 50% of visitors bouncing after just the home page and the average user spending less than a minute on a site, Half the Sky is likely losing users before they ever have the opportunity to donate or get involved.

Figure 2: Half the Sky Online Donation Process

For cause-driven organizations, it is also important that the mission is readily apparent and that the layout anticipates users’ needs. The (RED) campaign does an excellent job on both of these fronts. As shown in Figure 3, the campaign’s purpose, “Fighting for an AIDS free generation,” is written clearly across the top of the page, and almost any need can be handled through the main navigation bar. Members of the media can easily find information about the program as well as the results of the campaign thus far. Consumers can quickly find all of the (RED) products from every partner brand using the “SHOP” link. Those looking to donate or join the campaign can do so in one click: “GET INVOLVED” or “DONATE.” (RED) even allows its web

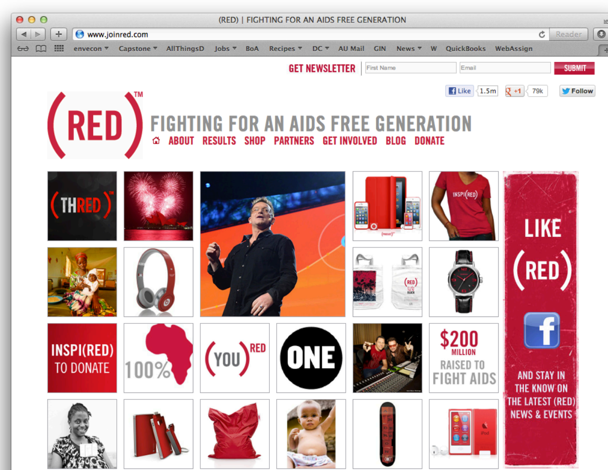

Figure 3: (RED) Campaign Website

visitors to sign up for its newsletter *without leaving the home page*. The ease with which users can interact with the website and find the content they need make this a great example of a cause-centric website.

Generating Web Traffic

"If you make a product good enough, even though you live in the depths of the forest, the public will make a path to your door, says the philosopher. But if you want the public in sufficient numbers, you would better construct a highway."

–William Randolph Hearst

In the world of digital marketing, the "highway" to a website is composed of several different tools. Search engine optimization, paid advertising, email marketing, and social media are all "designed to drive targeted, pre-qualified traffic to your website."[22] The words "targeted" and "pre-qualified" are key here. Driving traffic just for volume's sake does little more than eat up bandwidth. This brings me to a point Greg Satell makes about the traditional marketing purchase funnel in his *Forbes* article "What Makes Digital Marketing Fundamentally Different?" The "funnel," depicted below, essentially describes the stages of the purchasing process, and for a long time, the assumption has been that "the more people you put into the front of the funnel, the more sales you'll get out the end."[23] While perhaps this holds true in some cases, cause-driven organizations should be familiar with the reality that increased awareness does not always translate into action. This is especially true in a digital world of easy alternatives and multitaskers. As explained in the footnotes on page 5, I will not be addressing search engine optimization and paid advertising at length in this report. Thus, I begin with email marketing.

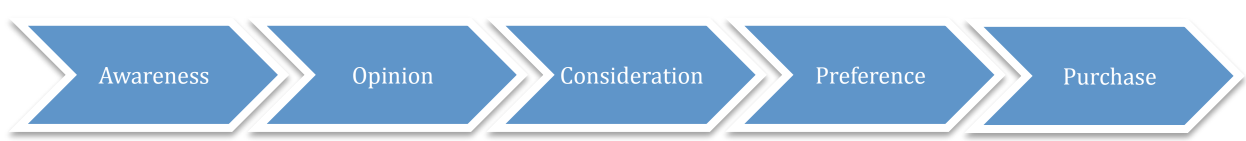

Figure 4: The "Purchase Funnel"

Email Marketing

Email marketing is of particular value to cause-based organizations for three main reasons: first, its cost-effectiveness provides an incredibly high return on investment; second, almost everyone, whether they be Baby Boomers or Millennials, has an email account, and third, it is immediate. Many of the principles of website design apply equally to email marketing. Few recipients will actually read through the text of an entire email, and email marketers agree that content must be "punchy," scannable, and engaging, with the most important or catchy information at the top. The area "above the fold," meaning the portion of the email visible when initially opened, is the most valuable real estate in a message. Subject lines must instantly communicate the value of the message within and should not be too ambiguous.[24]

According to Baydin, an email management service, the average email user receives close to 150 emails per day and deletes roughly half of them. Deletion takes an average of 3.2 seconds per message, meaning that an organization has mere seconds to capture a user's interest.[25] For this reason, it is extremely important for cause-driven organizations to segment their audiences and send out different versions of emails to distinct groups. This way, recipients receive an email that is highly relevant to their specific circumstances or interests, and thus, they are more likely to perceive value in opening and reading the email. To monitor the success of email blasts, Google Analytics can track who received a message, who opened it, and who clicked through to donate, get involved, etc.—all for free. These results can then be put to use to continuously tweak and improve the effectiveness of the organization's email campaigns. A-B testing, which involves sending slightly different messages to similar users to compare the effects of a small change, can also be a useful method of streamlining email outreach.[26]

Though many aspects of email marketing apply to both profit-driven businesses and cause-driven organizations, there are a few best practices that nonprofits in particular should put into play. Arthur Brooks, the president of the American Enterprise Institute, notes in *Social Entrepreneurship* that all cause-based emails should include a call to action and address the reader directly. Over 15% of donors lapse because they either do not remember supporting an organization, were not asked to re-give, or did not feel

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"I will be outspent"

the subject line from the most successful fundraising email of Obama's 2012 campaign[27]

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needed. This goes against conventional wisdom that donors tend to "fatigue" after too many requests from an organization. In reality, these out-of-the-loop, lapsed donors could be easily retained with a few timely emails—the majority of nonprofit organizations should communicate with their stakeholders more, not less.[28] Notably, observational studies have found that narrative stories and photos resonate much more strongly than facts and figures, and they are a good method of ensuring stakeholders do not forget an organization they once supported. Emails should be an engaging teaser to further information that can be found on an organization's website. The immediacy of email also provides the opportunity for more relevant narratives and more regular calls to action.[29]

Barack Obama's two successful presidential campaigns employed each of these best practices, and both his 2008 and 2012 runs are widely cited as examples of well run, cause-focused email campaigns. Obama's email team used data to optimize every aspect of every email they sent, and they did not make the mistake of contacting their supporters too infrequently. The campaigns' chief data scientist, Rayid Ghani, said when he first joined the campaign, he thought they were sending out too many emails, but as Brooks anticipated, the data proved him wrong. Ghani told *Forbes*, "When we sent more email, we got more money. More so than unsubscribes. We were making 15% more money for every email we sent in the day."[30] Each of those emails made heavy use of A-B testing, and the campaign often sent out numerous tests of different subject lines, different content, and different calls to action to see what was most effective. All in all, Obama won election and reelection, and digital fundraising alone brought in over $690 million in the 2012 election cycle—a knockout success.[31]

Social Media

Social media is an umbrella term for all "web-based software and services that allow users to come together online and exchange, discuss, communicate, and participate in any form of social interaction."[32] As an industry, social media is still in its infancy. None of the major platforms in use today have even celebrated a double-digit birthday. With this in mind, the fact that both Facebook and YouTube have now achieved the one billion monthly active users milestone is even more impressive.[33]

Notably, 92% of consumers now cite word of mouth as the number one source for information about products, services, and organizations.[35] Social media is word of

"[Social media] is easy, it's convenient, and it's incredibly powerful; not because of the technology, but because of how that technology nurtures the connections between people."[34]

mouth on steroids. Jane Smith is not just sharing her opinions on the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act with her close friends and family, she is broadcasting them to her extended network of hundreds of acquaintances, old classmates, colleagues, and even strangers in the digital world. Social media is fundamentally changing the way we communicate, and use of social media platforms now accounts for 18% of the time web surfers spend online.[36]

Harnessing the Millennial Generation

Cause-driven organizations are best suited to thrive in this new environment. Erik Qualman, author of *Socialnomics*, has studied what he calls "braggadocian behavior" among social media users.[37] In a nutshell: people like to share content that makes them look smart, cool, witty, etc. A study called "Young Adults Revealed" that was conducted by Synovate and Microsoft in 2012 surveyed over 12,000 individuals between the ages of 18 to 24 from 26 different countries on their interaction with brands online. 28% of respondents had discussed a brand in an online forum or posted brand-related content on a social networking site. The study also found that these young adults are "keen to share opinions and information online and [are] aware of their potential to influence others."[38]

With 95% of Millennials considered to be active web users, they are by far the most engaged generation online.[39] This is great news for cause-driven organizations looking to grow their digital presence. Qualman, who has spoken internationally on Millennials' online behavior, notes in *Socialnomics* that Millennials have a "strong desire to make the world a better place" and understand that they are part of a global community.[40] In fact, a 2010 Pew Research study found that almost a quarter of Millennials say that helping those in need is one of the most important things in life.[41] To illustrate this point, Qualman takes us back to 2008, less than two years after Facebook had expanded its registration beyond student networks. At the time, the most popular application on Facebook was not a game or music sharing program; it was an app called "Causes," and it had close to 20 million active monthly users. Causes allowed users to start, join, and even directly donate to organizations and issues users cared about.[42] The application now has a dedicated website and has expanded beyond the Facebook platform. The Causes site claims that 30% of visitors choose to take action and over 20% share the cause with friends. To date, "over 170 million people have taken action for over 500,000 unique causes."[43] Causes capitalized early on the fact that people want to be associated with and take ownership of products or organizations that enhance their image as an individual. Millennials are eager to brand themselves as engaged, global citizens, and cause-driven organizations should look to social media to harness this opportunity.

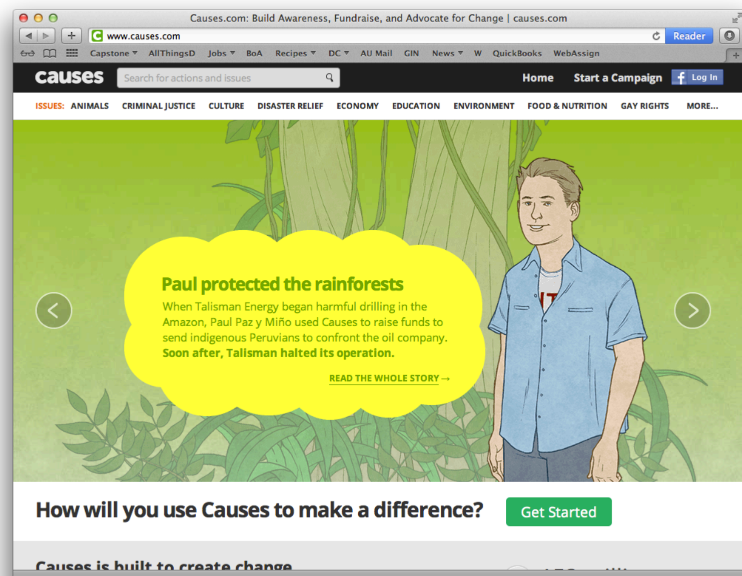

Figure 5: Causes Website

A Tool for Engagement

Social media is unprecedented in the opportunity it provides cause-driven organizations to engage directly with existing and potential supporters. By monitoring conversations on blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms, organizations can keep an ear to the ground, stay up to date on public sentiment, and get unfiltered feedback on their work. Conversing directly with supporters and detractors can raise an organization's profile, make it appear more responsive to stakeholders, and build its reputation as an authority in its field. By engaging positively with those who already have a favorable opinion of a cause or organization, marketers can nurture passionate advocates. By appropriately confronting and dispelling negative opinions, marketers can also nip misinformation in the bud or demonstrate an organization's commitment to truth and transparency.[44] In this way, social media can help level the playing field between small organizations and those with multimillion-dollar budgets. The most widely adopted and thus influential social media platforms are free for users, and many have a variety of tools or special perks specifically for nonprofit organizations. I will discuss tips and techniques for engagement from social media experts in the subsequent sections on individual platforms.

Facebook

> *"We're pushing to make the world a more open place, and we do this by building things that help people use their real connections to share information more effectively."*
>
> *–Mark Zuckerburg, 2007*

With over one billion active monthly users, Facebook is by far the most widely and regularly used social media platform.[45] Facebook's Pages feature is the best way to build a presence on the network, and there are two welcome bonuses for resource-strapped nonprofits: It is easy to use *and* free. In March 2013, Facebook published "Building your presence with Facebook Pages: A guide for causes and nonprofits." Full of insights from the king of social networking itself, I defer to this guide as the dominant source of best practices in this section.

When creating your Page, Facebook recommends considering three things first: story, audience, and goals. As with all forms of social media, it is important to have a unique voice and present an organization's story in a "compelling, authentic, and personal way."[46] Organizations must also determine what content will be of interest to their audience, what type of relationships they aim to build, and how often they will be updating their Pages.[47]

When “finding an online voice,” Facebook recommends using first-person speech and images to humanize organizations. Fundamentally, Facebook users are looking to connect with the individuals behind organizations as well as with other users engaging with the cause. Share photos and candid stories from the organization’s staff and foster a two-way dialogue with its supporters. Use status updates to ask questions, ignite conversation, and encourage people to like or comment on posts. Personal engagement will resonate with the organization’s community, and doing so will empower your supporters to contribute to the Page. Facebook also recommends that organizations keep the focus on their contributors. If someone makes a particularly insightful comment or uploads a powerful photo, share it and tag the person to thank him or her directly. “Fill in the blank” posts are also an easy way to solicit comments and spark conversation, and they can be extremely useful for gaining feedback and directing attention to a specific attribute of an organization. Facebook data shows also that “fill in the blank” posts generate close to twice the engagement of a standard text post.[48]

While maintaining a presence on a variety of social media platforms can help organizations reach a larger audience, it is important to have at least some content that is exclusive to each outlet. Facebook notes that re-posting press releases or recycling content across various platforms can result in low engagement. Tailoring content exclusively for the Facebook audience will demonstrate an organization’s acknowledgement of the community as a unique group and keep its supporters coming back. Organizations can even use Pages’ targeted publishing feature to connect with niche groups within their communities for an even more personalized experience.[49]

Figure 6: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Facebook Page

To encourage return visits, Facebook also notes that organizations should schedule regular posts on specific topics, such as a volunteer of the week feature story or a photo of the day “from the field.” Sharing real-time images and videos through mobile uploads is a great way to provide supporters with peeks into the behind the scenes operations of an organization from day to day. According to Facebook, rich media draws more attention on users’ News Feeds than simple text. Posts that include a photo album, a picture, or a video generate 180%, 120%, and 100% more engagement than a text only post respectively. A look at the Facebook Page for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Figure 6, will quickly confirm these numbers. A post from March 26, 2013 that included a photo of Bill Gates' meeting with farmers in Ghana generated 2,113 likes, 153 shares, and 135 comments. In comparison, a text only post about "reinventing the condom" from March 20, 2013 only generated 775 likes, 172 shares, and 88 comments. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is acutely aware of the draw of rich media: nearly every post on the organization's Page features an image or video.[50] Instagram, which is owned by Facebook and thus seamlessly integrated into the platform, is a great tool for real-time, mobile-based photo sharing. As one might expect, timeliness is also a key factor in engagement. For example, Facebook has found that on July 4th, posts about Independence Day generate nearly twice the interaction of all unrelated posts on the holiday. Causes and nonprofits should take note and make sure to tailor their content around key dates and points in the news cycle.[51]

As previously discussed, the ability to measure and continually refine is one of the greatest appeals of digital marketing. Above all, Facebook encourages causes and nonprofits to experiment, monitor feedback, adjust, and experiment some more. Facebook Insights is a valuable, free tool that allows you to track important indicators such as likes, reach, and "people talking about this" on each individual post. Organizations can use this information to refine their content and determine things like the time of day during which their supporters are online and most engaged.[52] By employing all of the available tools and techniques, organizations can attract and nurture advocates of their cause.

Thus far, everything I have described in the section on Facebook Pages can be done at no financial cost by a person without a technical background in web development. With either an in-house web developer or by contracting with one of Facebook's Preferred Marketing Developers, organizations can develop applications to embed within their Pages. For example, Amnesty International has developed apps that allow fans to donate, take action, and even view live streams of events directly on Facebook. This kind of seamless integration can reduce the bounce rate of trying to redirect users externally to a website.[53]

Applications can also help cause-driven organizations to stand out from marketing clutter online. Notably, charity: water created an app that let fans "pledge their birthday" to bring clean water to those in need. Harnessing the power of social media, when a user makes the pledge, the story is shared with his or her friends on Facebook, generating donations, impressions, and increased interaction with the charity: water page.[54] Similarly, Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) asked users to "donate their Facebook Timeline" in honor of World Alzheimer's Day in 2012. This application took advantage of Facebook's unique setup as an online record of users' offline lives. The app slowly, though temporarily, erased pieces of a user's Timeline such as statuses, photos, comments, etc. and replaced the "lost memories" with the message, "Imagine your life without memories. For 36 million people living with Alzheimer's disease, this is a reality." ADI's creative use of Facebook brought Alzheimer's to the web community in a deeply personal way and successfully generated a good deal of media buzz.[55]

Google+

Although Google+ does not have a user base as colossal as Facebook's, there are two unique tools that make it a valuable platform for cause-driven organizations in particular: Communities and Hangouts. As another social networking site, the "rules of engagement" for Google+ are very similar to those I described in the section on Facebook, so I will not focus on those here.

Communities are the Google+ version of an online group or forum. They are meant to unite users with a common interest to discuss, and they provide cause-driven organizations with a great opportunity to interact with influencers and build a reputation as an authority on a topic—all at no financial cost. Unlike Facebook, where users' focus is on interaction with friends they have made offline, Communities connects users who may not have a preexisting relationship. These users " . . . are more interested in vibrant conversations around topics than they are about self-promotion."[56] On Facebook, users make "like" a nonprofit's page for the "braggadocian" reasons Erik Qualman described in *Socialnomics*. Alternatively, on Google+, users, at least for the time being, predominantly join Communities because they are interested in receiving and sharing content.[57]

I will use the "Human Trafficking" Community to illustrate the opportunities for causes and nonprofits on Google+. Human Trafficking has a membership of about 300. This relatively small group is composed of both individuals and organizations fighting human trafficking, and every day, they share articles, events, and other information with each other. Interestingly, the most active members of the Community are the individuals. This is a missed opportunity for organizations like Not For Sale and the Half the Sky Movement. Both are members of the group but have not engaged with the influencers who are leading the discussion. As the Community grows, it will raise the profile of those who are regular contributors. Google+ Communities are still relatively new, which means that there is ample opportunity for even the smallest nonprofits to get a foothold as authorities in their respective areas of work.[58]

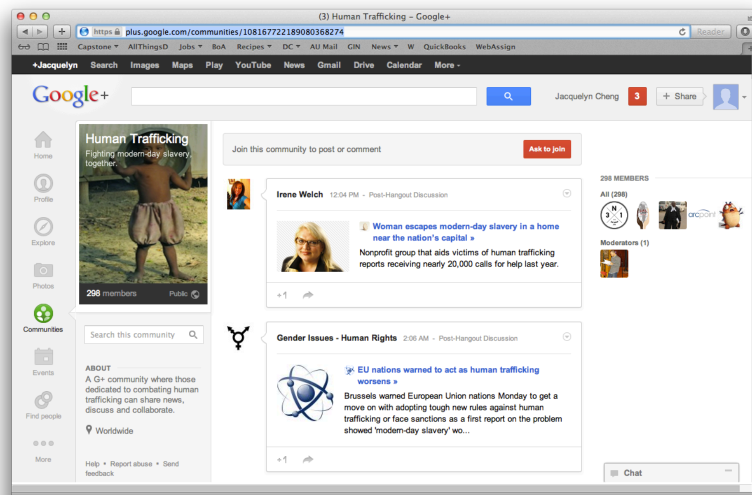

Figure 7: Human Trafficking Google+ Community

Hangouts are another great feature for nonprofits and causes that is unique to Google+. A Hangout is essentially a group meeting with live video feed that can be public or private, and the medium lends itself extremely well to panel discussions or demonstrations. Nonprofits like Amnesty International USA have successfully used the tool to host discussions with thought leaders in different locations on issues like the Arms Trade Treaty. With a large network of student groups, there is also the opportunity for Amnesty to host workshops on topics like community activism or lobbying in the future. These Hangouts are incredibly simple to organize, look both polished and professional, and can be hosted at no financial cost.[59]

Twitter

Twitter is undoubtedly one of the most valuable digital tools for profit-driven and cause-driven organizations alike. The microblogging service allows people and organizations to broadcast public messages of up to 140 characters at a time. While at first this may seem too short for any valuable content, the platform has become an incredible, real-time barometer of public opinion on the web. In our modern, hyperconnected society, no major world event goes uncommented on by the tweeting masses.

Unlike letters and emails directed to public figures, Twitter is inherently a *public* messaging system, making it a powerful advocacy tool. Even a small amount of chatter can elicit a response from a targeted individual. Amnesty International, which is well known for its use of letter writing campaigns on behalf of prisoners of conscience, has begun hosting regular "tweetathons" on key issues to amplify its message. This March, Amnesty even took Twitter advocacy a step further and launched a Twitter-based petition in support of the UN Arms Trade Treaty. Advocates could add their "twignature" to the document by retweeting the original petition tweet from @amnesty. At the time of writing, the document has over 800 "twignatures" and counting.[60] Shonali Burke, who ran a highly successful tweetathon for USA for UNHCR's Blue Key Campaign on June 13, 2011, has compiled a list of tips for nonprofits looking to make the most of Twitter. Notably, she recommends that organizations staff their tweetathons to engage with those involved, monitor content, and keep the ball rolling during slow periods. Burke also advises organizations to use a clearly defined hashtag but have variety in their posts. Perhaps most importantly, organizations must also promote the tweetathon ahead of time and have a clear end goal to communicate to contributors.[61] Burke's Blue Key tweetathon generated 1,524 tweets the day of the event and was responsible for a 169% increase in web traffic over the previous high point to the USA for UNHCR

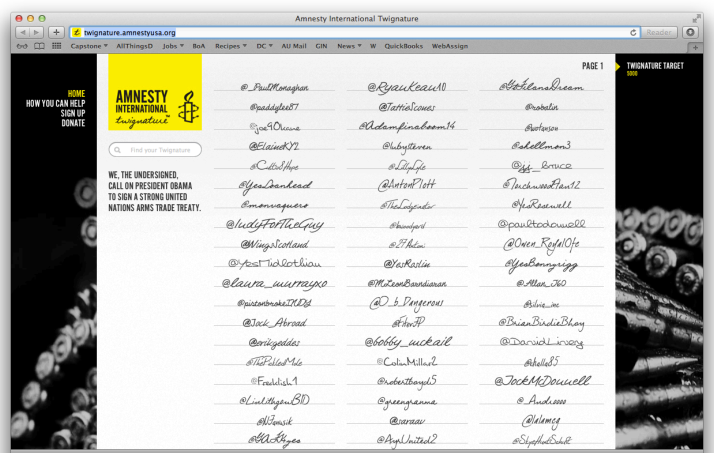

Figure 8: Amnesty International "Twignatures"

website. There was also a positive financial outcome: more than 50% of the blue key purchases that week were a direct result of the tweetathon.[62]

Twitter is built for speed, making it an exceptional platform for engagement with cause supporters. As with Facebook, it is crucial to establish a consistent voice for an organization in its use of the platform. There is some debate on the appropriate approach for organizations. Some social media strategists say that consistency is the most important factor and that the nature of the voice, whether it be casual, authoritative or otherwise, is secondary.[63] However, M+R Strategic Services, a communications firm that specializes specifically in nonprofit clientele, has found that organizations that use a "personal voice" on Twitter as opposed to an "official voice" tend to be the most successful. M+R also recommends that organizations streamline the approval process and empower those staffing the Twitter account to respond in a timely manner. This will give the account a sense of authenticity, allow the organization to converse directly with other tweeters, and make it possible to react to real-time events.[64] The Red Cross has been a pioneer in the use of Twitter for real-time disaster response. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the tsunami in Japan, the Red Cross provided frequent updates via its Twitter Feed and used the platform to coordinate donations and volunteers. Additionally, the organization strives to converse with and respond to supporters directly, and it regularly uses relevant hashtags to categorize its tweets for those searching for information. As proof of its success, @RedCross is one of the most successful nonprofit Twitter accounts, with close to one million followers as of April 2013.[65]

Countless numbers of digital marketing strategists have weighed in on appropriate Twitter engagement, but there are only a few things that have emerged as universally agreed upon across the board. First, in the words of web consultant Chris Tuttle, "Use crowdsourcing to your advantage. Ask your network for ideas, tips, resources, and feedback."[66] Social media scientist Dan Zarrella has conducted statistical studies that support Tuttle's statement. He found that the most retweeted tweets often contain "ask" words with phrases like, "you," "please," "retweet," "help," "please retweet," "follow," "how," and "check out" all making the top 20.[67] As with Facebook, rich media like photos and YouTube videos also resonate with Twitter followers. Jen Price, a nonprofit fundraising consultant, phrased this nicely in a tweet from her account @PhilanthropyInk: "Using Twitter to engage nonprofit supporters? Share photos of org's impact. A picture is worth more than 140 characters. #TwitterTips."[68]

While there is no consistent recipe for timing and frequency of tweets because it so heavily depends on the specific organization, content, and circumstances, most social media experts agree that it is important for organizations to tweet a variety of content. Sharing only an organization's own links and thoughts without engagement with others can make the organization's account appear too self-serving and out of touch with industry partners, influencers, supporters, and detractors.[69] This is one area in which Amnesty International could definitely improve. As the screen capture in Figure 9 shows, Amnesty only *very* rarely shares content from other accounts. When it does, those accounts are usually the personal Twitters of its staff members. For a nonprofit that prides itself on being a membership organization, Amnesty does a below average job of using Twitter to directly engage with its supporters and discuss its human rights work.

Likely the most famous use of Twitter for a charitable cause occurred back in 2009 when CNN and Ashton Kutcher raced to the one million followers milestone on behalf of Malaria No More. Both CNN and Kutcher pledged to donate nets to help fight malaria in Africa, and in the process of their "battle," generated millions of media impressions. @malarianomore saw a 10,000% increase in the number of its followers on Twitter, and the surge of traffic to MalariaNoMore.org in the month of April was larger than the traffic from the previous 12 months combined. The campaign sought to build momentum in the lead up to World Malaria Day, raising awareness and donations in the process. It was undeniably a success: close to 90,000 nets were donated and distributed, and Malaria No More raised over $500,000 from Twitter alone. On April 25, 2009, the most retweeted message was "Every 30 seconds a child dies from malaria. Nets save lives. Support World Malaria Day. www.malarianomore.org." The campaign benefited from a large amount of celebrity involvement and received donations from over 42 different countries. Malaria No More's Twitter campaign was an excellent example of the power of digital to "transcend traditional boundaries like geography and time zones to reach a truly global audience… and all with the investment of nothing more than imagination and a little bit of time."[70]

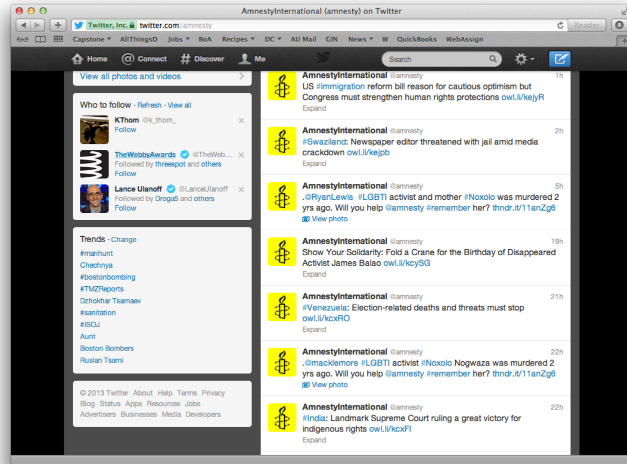

Figure 9: Amnesty International Twitter Feed

Blogs

The "blogosphere" is home to major online influencers and is often a hub for Internet buzz. Running an active blog for an organization is an excellent way to add a personal element to broader work. Blogs stand out from the social media outlets previously mentioned because they are not constricted by length or the formatting of a specific platform. An organization can have as much control over a blog as it does its website, allowing for the opportunity to tackle topics more in depth or from a variety of individual perspectives. Additionally, keeping a consistently-updated blog will help optimize your site for its ranking in search engine results.[71]

Damian Ryan notes in *Understanding Digital Marketing* that prominent bloggers tend to be the biggest online influencers of all. Thus, building relationships with these people can be an excellent way to leverage their prominence for an organization's success. For this reason, it is important to know the popular blogs in relevant fields of work, who writes for them, what they are writing about, what angle they are coming from, and which topics generate the most buzz. Organizations can use this information to appeal to influential bloggers and also attract attention from their audiences.[72]

World Vision, a humanitarian organization working to empower families and fight poverty, has won recognition for the blog it launched in 2011. The blog's "About Us" page reads:

> We're a diverse community of staff members, donors, supporters, advocates, church leaders, and others who have been touched by World Vision's efforts to build a better world for those whom we serve. We're here to share our stories—and to connect with our readers by providing a glimpse of the scope and depth of World Vision's ministry.[73]

Figure 10: World Vision Blog

World Vision expertly uses its blog to do exactly what its "About Us" page claims: It brings together a wide variety of World Vision stakeholders across its many areas of work. The posts include photos, videos, and highly personalized stories of the organization's accomplishments. Allowing individuals from World Vision to post to the blog in their own voices under their own names humanizes the organization and provides a sense of transparency. World Vision also makes it very easy to navigate the blog by sorting posts by category and date as well as through the inclusion of a search element. The organization even goes a step further and allows readers to subscribe via RSS (Really Simple Syndication) to easily receive updates.[74]

In line with Damian Ryan's recommendations, World Vision's Blog also includes a "Blogger Resources" center. The page reveals an opportunity to subscribe to an email list that sends out news, campaign information, and other resources tailored exclusively for bloggers. Most notably, World Vision also provides over a dozen pre-coded images, banners, and widgets that make it easy for supporters to share on their own blogs. As Ryan mentions, this is an excellent way for the organization to leverage its network online. World Vision even includes an open invitation to bloggers to request further resources or to submit ideas at any time. World Vision clearly uses its blog to its fullest potential: as a tool for *two-way* communication.[75]

Media Sharing

Previous sections have touched on media sharing sites and applications, but I will review them more directly here. Media sharing sites are tools for the distribution of rich media content: videos, photographs, lecture slides, etc. The most prominent of these sites are YouTube, Vimeo, SlideShare, Instagram, Picasa, and Flickr.[76] As mentioned, rich media generally performs better from a "virality" standpoint than does simple text-based content, and it is important for cause-driven organizations to incorporate these platforms into their broader social media strategy. I focus in this section on the particular utility of online video for cause-driven organizations as a tool to unleash empathy and overcome compassion fatigue.

Online rich media is effectively creating a "global living room" by allowing people across time zones and political boundaries to share an experience.[77] Hunter Walk, Director of Product Management for YouTube, captured this potential in an eloquent article he wrote for *Fast Co.Exist*:

> . . . global citizenship means identifying with one another as people with a common experience before subdividing by other factors like nationality, religion, or political beliefs. What will finally create empathy and understanding between a young man in Tokyo, a middle-aged woman in Dallas, and a teenager in São Paulo? Not politics. Not religion. But media.[78]

Though Walk, as an employee of YouTube, is obviously predisposed to favoring video as a medium, he makes a point that many prominent web influencers and digital marketing agencies have also discovered: Video can convey images, sounds, and emotions in a way that other modes of communication cannot, and the web has unleashed its potential. Walk notes that over seventy percent of YouTube video views occur outside of the United States. In fact, the most avid users of YouTube are Saudi Arabians, who view more videos per capita than any other country.[79]

In comparison to standard businesses, cause-driven organizations obviously thrive on empathy, which means they are at a unique advantage in the use of online rich media. These organizations should use video as a medium for giving greater insight into their work and the people behind it. This is especially true for organizations that work internationally. Video is the clearest possible way to convey the severity of a problem like extreme poverty, violence, or disease that might not otherwise translate to a first-world audience. Seeing, hearing, and connecting emotionally with an *individual* suffering from these plights is the most effective way to engage potential donors and volunteers. YouTube for Nonprofits is a great resource for organizations looking to seize this opportunity. YouTube provides nonprofits with live streaming services, video annotations, advanced channel branding, call-to-action overlays, and a channel donate button—all free of charge.[80] Additionally, if a small organization does not have the resources to produce a video, YouTube's Video Volunteers Program can match the group with a skilled video-maker—again, for free.[81] As evidence of the potential for cause-focused video, the most viral ad campaign ever on YouTube is the "Kony 2012" video created by Invisible Children last year. Within a week and a half, the video had garnered over 112 million total views. By comparison, the second place finisher is Old Spice, which had a total of 95.6 million views; the difference is that it took Old Spice a *year* to reach that number. Visible Measures, a viral video research site, also announced that "Kony 2012" reached 100 million views faster than *any* video—ad or otherwise—that it had ever tracked. I delve more deeply into the viral Kony 2012 campaign in the following section as a case study in digital marketing for social good.[82]

CASE STUDY: KONY 2012

Background

Since 1987, Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army have been "abducting, killing, and displacing civilians" in central and eastern Africa.[83] Invisible Children is a nonprofit organization launched in 2004 to bring a permanent end to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and to stop Joseph Kony. In March of 2012, Invisible Children launched Kony 2012, a campaign designed to bring awareness to Kony's heinous crimes and to create momentum for his arrest.[84]

Objectives

Invisible Children lists the following goals for the campaign on its website:

1. Make Joseph Kony famous to create global awareness of LRA atrocities.
2. Increase protection of civilians from LRA attacks.
3. Pressure international governments to support the regional efforts to stop the LRA.
4. See Joseph Kony and his top commanders captured by regional forces and tried by the International Criminal Court.[85]

Strategies

Kony 2012 was an integrated campaign that included both digital elements and more traditional forms of marketing. However, Invisible Children designed the program as an "experiment" in viral digital marketing and centered the campaign around a single, thirty-minute YouTube video. The video begins by explaining the atrocities committed by Joseph Kony and the LRA and goes on to provide some of the back story of Invisible Children's work. The film emphasizes to viewers that although the group had been terrorizing central and eastern Africa for years, 99 percent of the world's population did not know the name of the world's most wanted criminal. The last 30 seconds of the video also serve as a call to action, asking viewers to:

1. Sign the pledge to show your support
2. Get the bracelet and the action kit
3. Sign up for Tri to donate a few dollars a month
4. Above all, share this movie online[86]

In addition to these more formal calls to action, the film also makes two further requests from its viewers. The Kony 2012 name was in part derived from the campaign's outreach push toward 20 "culture makers" and 12 "policy makers" who Invisible Children tagged as having the power to spur Americans and the U.S. government to tangible action in arresting Joseph Kony. The video asks its viewers to "write them directly, call them, meet with them, and get their attention." The list included a diverse group: People like Angelina Jolie, Tim Tebow, Bono, and Mark Zuckerburg all made the cut as cultural influencers, and political icons like Bill Clinton, John Kerry, George W. Bush, and Condoleezza Rice rounded out the "policy maker" group.

Invisible Children made it easy for supporters to act on this request through links on its website.[87]

The final piece of the campaign was a more traditional marketing push to "cover the night" on April 20, 2012. The viral video's intent was to spur the masses to action, so that when America woke up on the morning of Saturday, April 21st, the physical world would be plastered with Kony 2012 posters, stickers, and "the graffiti of digital empathy."[88] Supporters could easily purchase the "action kit," which included a Kony t-shirt, bumper sticker, button, stickers, three bracelets, and ten posters, through Invisible Children's website for twenty dollars.[89]

Outcomes and Evaluation

Invisible Children's Kony 2012 campaign is a story of mixed success. In one sense, the video surpassed all expectations. Despite its length, "Kony 2012" became the most viral video of all time with over 112 million total views in the first ten days of its release. There are several best practices that Invisible Children capitalized upon in the creation and distribution of the video. First, the film undeniably fosters a sense of

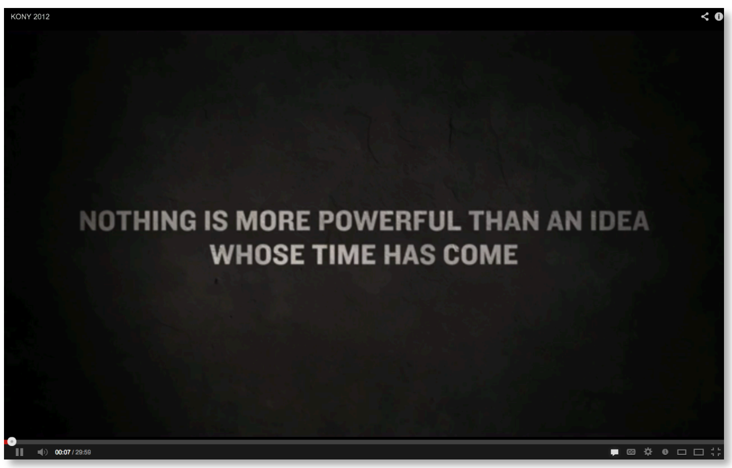

Figure 11: Screenshot from "Kony 2012"

empathy by making things personal for the domestic American audience. The video starred not only Kony himself and Jacob Acaye, a Ugandan child who fell victim to the LRA, but also Jason Russell, co-founder of Invisible Children, and his five-year-old son. As Megan Garber wrote for *The Atlantic*, the Kony 2012 campaign "forced viewers to see Kony's story as an extension of Jason Russell's story, and of Jason Russell's organization's story, and of Jason Russell's kid's story. That was supposed to be what made the thing 'relatable.'"[90]

Interestingly, this relatability factor is not only the source of Kony 2012's greatest success, but also of some of its greatest criticisms. Many in the field of international studies accused Jason Russell of playing to the "white savior complex" and exploiting both his own son and Jacob Acaye to tug at the heartstrings of viewers.[91] Others felt that the video oversimplified a complicated international issue and failed to make clear that Kony and LRA now operate predominately in the Central African Republic—not Uganda. Although this is perhaps a valid critique, at thirty minutes already, it is hard to see how Invisible Children could have thoroughly fleshed out the nuances without turning “Kony 2012” from a viral video into a full blown documentary. With most YouTube videos ringing in at less than three minutes, it is already remarkable that a half-hour long film was able to hold the public’s constantly divided attention and captivate so many.[92]

These critiques acknowledged, the Kony 2012 campaign was still a runaway success by most standards. From a social media standpoint, the campaign generated a huge amount of buzz that is rarely, if ever, seen from cause marketing campaigns. I include some of the more notable statistics here:

- As mentioned, “Kony 2012” reached over 100 million views in just six days, making it the fastest growing viral video in the history of the Internet.
- Over 3.7 million people from 185 countries pledge their support for Kony 2012.
- At 3.1 million likes, Invisible Children became the most liked non-profit on Facebook.
- Every week, “Kony 2012” continues to get 100,000 views.
- Since the launch of Kony 2012, Invisible Children’s Facebook fans have increased by 621% and its Twitter following grew by 614%.
- Joseph Kony was ranked the 9th “most searched” person on Google in the year following the Kony 2012 launch.[93]

Given that both Joseph Kony and Invisible Children were names few had heard of before the campaign, these are some truly remarkable numbers. In addition to the emotional appeal of the video, there are several other factors behind the campaign’s viral success. Importantly, the video included a clear and simple call to action. The “ask” was direct—Invisible Children literally used a numbered list at the end of the film—and made it easy for viewers to contribute.[94] Supporters could donate directly on the video’s YouTube page through the YouTube for Nonprofits program, reducing the bounce rate that would naturally occur from referring users to a separate website.

Invisible Children also successfully implemented another digital marketing best practice by identifying the 32 “culture and policy makers” they believed could have the biggest impact on the campaign. The organization leveraged its network of supporters to target these individuals and provided a portal of links on its website to streamline the messaging process. On social media channels, these messages had the doubled effect of pressuring the influencers to take action while also sharing support for the Kony 2012 campaign with a user’s entire network. Many of the influencers, in turn, tweeted about Kony, reaching an extended audience of over 60 million people.[95] It can comfortably be said that Invisible Children achieved its first objective to “make Joseph Kony” famous.

Although Joseph Kony and the LRA are still in operation in central and eastern Africa, the campaign achieved other notable “real world” successes. On April 25, 2012, President Obama renewed the small U.S. troop commitment to help bring an end to the LRA, and within the next few months, the United Nations, European Union, and African Union all pledged support and released strategies for stopping the LRA’s violence. In January 2013, the U.S. Congress also passed the Rewards for Justice Bill, which offers up to $5 million for information leading to Joseph Kony's arrest. These pledges have helped remove two LRA commanders from the battlefield, reduce LRA civilian killings by 67%, and inspire the defection and surrender of other LRA troops. These achievements represent the fulfillment of two of the campaign's other objectives: "to pressure international governments to support the regional efforts to stop the LRA" and "to increase the protection of civilians from LRA attacks."[96]

From the fundraising perspective, Kony 2012 was also a tremendous success for Invisible Children. The campaign brought in over $12 million in net revenue for the organization, with Invisible Children spending about $140,000 to produce the "Kony 2012" video and about $3.4 million on the rest of the campaign. Admittedly, this represents spending on a scale that many nonprofits do not have the resources to replicate, and many of the campaign's detractors brought up the classic nonprofit marketing critique that administrative and fundraising costs should be kept to a bare minimum. However, the end numbers, if anything, support Brooks' and Pallotta's arguments that spending more on marketing is actually good for nonprofits and those they are trying to help. For every dollar spent on the Kony 2012 campaign, Invisible Children brought in almost four dollars in net proceeds to be spent on future efforts, such as the implementation of a radio warning system in LRA affected areas.[97]

Conclusions

Although Joseph Kony and the LRA are still at large, the Kony 2012 digital marketing campaign can be considered a net success. By implementing many of the best practices in digital marketing, Invisible Children achieved three out of the four objectives it set for the campaign and expanded the foundation upon which it could build its future work. The most notable shortcoming or "lesson learned" that digital cause marketers can take away from Kony 2012 is the difficulty of translating online action into "real world" activism. Although the campaign certainly generated a lot of chatter and did manage to raise an incredible amount of donations in a short period of time, Kony 2012 has since been cited as a prime example of "slacktivism." The "cover the night" call to action on April 20, 2012 that asked supporters to go out and quite literally cover their communities in Kony 2012 paraphernalia did not generate nearly the same level of engagement as the digital components of the campaign.[98] One mistake that Invisible Children did make was leaving more than a month long gap between the launch of the "Kony 2012" video and the "cover the night" event. By the time April 20th rolled around, the campaign had already lost a good deal of steam—further evidence of the short attention span users have online. Though the mixed digital and traditional marketing strategy had a good deal of potential, Invisible Children missed the opportunity to fully capitalize on its digital momentum.

CASE STUDY: WARBY PARKER

Background

Warby Parker is an eyewear company with a mission: to provide quality, inexpensive glasses to the world's most needy through its "buy a pair, give a pair" program. Although the company is a for-profit, I include it here as a case study of a cause-driven organization because its social purpose is deeply ingrained in the company culture, winning it certification as a registered Benefit Corporation ("B Corp").[99]

Warby Parker launched in 2010 and has since witnessed exponential growth, due in large part to the devotion and enthusiasm of its customers. Although the brand opened its first physical store in New York City this year, Warby Parker initially launched as an e-commerce only company, and appropriately, focused only on inexpensive, digital marketing at the outset. For this reason, this case study focuses only on the early years of Warby Parker's startup efforts in 2010-2011.

Objectives

When laying out its digital marketing strategy, Warby Parker had two main objectives in mind. First, it sought to build brand recognition by generating buzz online and encouraging word of mouth referrals. Second, the company set first year and second year sales and donation targets that it aimed to reach.[100] [3]

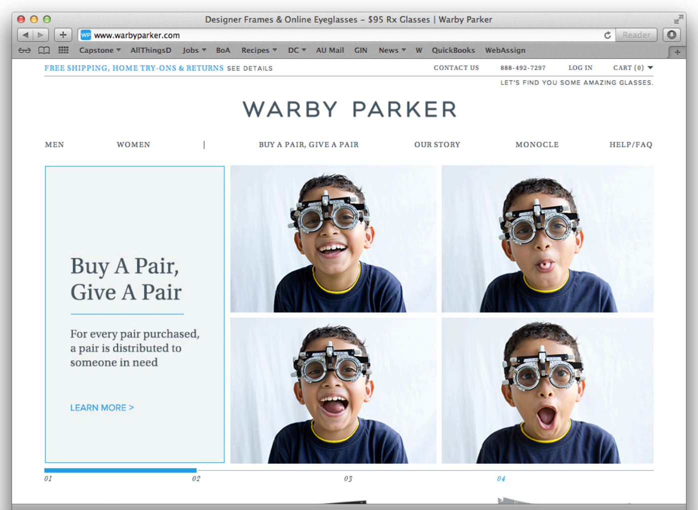

Figure 12: "Buy a Pair, Give a Pair"

[3] The concrete dollar values of Warby Parker's sales targets are not public available, however, this does not affect the evaluation portion of this case study. Warby Parker has widely publicized information regarding its growth and success in meeting sales projections.

Strategies

As a young startup without a steady revenue stream, Warby Parker's initial marketing push centered almost entirely around digital media. As proof of the fact that digital marketing is the great equalizer for small organizations, the company's marketing budget at launch was a whopping zero dollars. It was not until about a year and a half into the company's life that Warby Parker launched its first paid advertisement via Google AdWords.[101]

Co-founder Neil Blumenthal has said that Warby Parker has never focused on marketing in the traditional sense. He believes that with a great price point and a compelling social mission, Warby Parker would be a company whose story could spread naturally with a little help from social media. An integral part of the company's initial social media strategy was its home try-on program. As an e-commerce company, Warby Parker needed a way to allow its customers to really test out the glasses for themselves. With the home try-on program, Warby Parker mails five glasses of the customer's choosing to his or her home for a trial period—no charge or shipping fee attached. The catch is that customers have to post pictures or videos of themselves with the glasses to one of the company's various social media pages.[102]

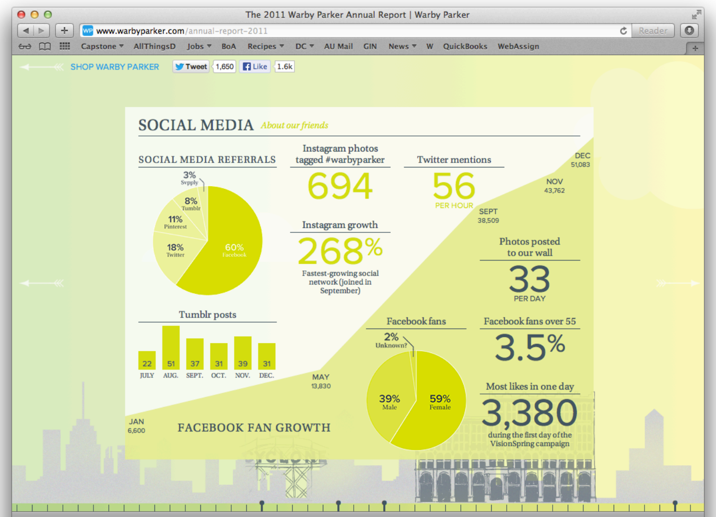

Figure 13: Social Media in Warby Parker 2011 Annual Report

The other key component of Warby Parker's branding strategy has been to use social media and its website to truly engage customers. The company quite literally responds to *every single* tweet, Facebook post, Instagram, email, and other forms of digital communication as well.[103] Neil Blumenthal has focused on making the company as transparent and responsive as possible—a philosophy that carries through from their social media interaction to their website. The Warby Parker website strives to be clean and user-friendly, and the company applied these goals equally to its 2011 online annual report. The report did not focus on dry financials and other information that would interest no one but investors. They instead included information that gave more depth to the company's social mission and to the employees behind the do gooder glasses. The report revealed statistics like the number of glasses the company had distributed to its non-profit partners and even had eye-catching infographics showing things as personal as the bagel preferences of Warby Parker's headquarters staff.[104]

Outcomes and Evaluation

By any standard, Warby Parker is doing digital marketing right. The most important element in its growth has been its strict adherence to using social media as a tool for *engagement* not broadcast. Co-founder Neil Blumenthal has said "We find that engagement fosters virality and builds loyalty," and the numbers back him up. Over 50% of Warby Parker's sales—and thus 50% of its eyeglass donations—are driven by word of mouth, and the company has one of the highest Net Promoter scores of any business.[105] The Net Promoter score of a company ranks its ratio of brand loyalists—those who are completely devoted to a brand and have recommended it to friends—to passive supporters and detractors. On a 100-point scale, Warby Parker has a score of 91.[106] To put this in perspective, one of the most beloved products, the Apple iPhone, only has a Net Promoter score of 70. It is safe to say that Warby Parker has vastly surpassed its objective to generate word of mouth referrals.[107]

As mentioned, Warby Parker has also taken social media engagement to a level few companies have ever attempted. Even with over 3,500 tweets coming in to @warbyparker per week, employees respond to every single message—and that is just on Twitter alone—and they do so in the casual, accessible voice that M+R Strategic Services has recommended for cause-driven organizations. The company has built an incredible social media following across all of its outlets, and this is because Warby Parker has successfully implemented another digital marketing best practice: have unique content on each social media platform. The company uses Pinterest to pin lifestyle images that it associates with each of its eyewear styles. Facebook and YouTube are its dominant tools for customer service and the home try-on program. Its Instagram provides snapshots of Warby Parker headquarters life. Twitter is its main tool for providing customers with a quick burst of attention and validation, and the company Tumblr is the outlet it uses to share its inspiration and more lengthy stories with its devoted fans. Perhaps most importantly, its website is extremely easy to use. Warby Parker makes effective use of whitespace to avoid clutter on its site, and the navigation and layout do an excellent job of anticipating users wants and needs. Together, these strategies are working: The company has certainly achieved a level of Internet virality that few organizations enjoy.[108]

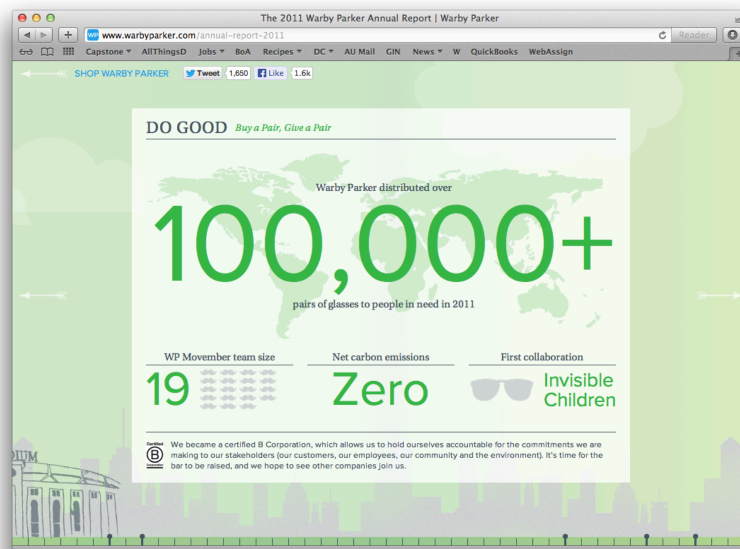

Figure 14:
Social Responsibility in Warby Parker 2011 Annual Report

Although Warby Parker does not publicly release its sales targets, financial projections, or end of year dollar sales figures, the company has provided enough information for any researcher, investor, or customer to comfortably agree upon its success. The cause-driven company grew over 500% from 2010 to 2011, and its founders have announced that the company exceeded its first *year* sales targets within its first *three weeks* of operation. By the end of 2011, Warby Parker had already donated over 100,000 eyeglasses to the world's poor through its non-profit partners like VisionSpring, and the company has only continued to grow. Co-founder Neil Blumenthal has even joked that when the company now does projections, they double them, and so far, that has been a more accurate strategy.[109]

Conclusions

Since 2008, Edelman has published the annual *goodpurpose* study, which "explores consumer attitudes around social purpose, including their commitment to specific societal issues and their expectations of brands."[110] The 2012 report found that 53% of consumers now rank social purpose as the most important factor in selecting a brand, other factors equal, and that 72% of people would help promote a brand that supports a good cause.[111] A 2010 study by Cone Communications also found that 90% of consumers want companies to tell them specifically how and what they are doing to support a cause.[112] What these numbers mean is that engagement and transparency are increasingly non-negotiable components of any viable cause-driven organization's strategy. Warby Parker stands as a shining example of how cause-driven organizations can use digital marketing to capitalize on this opportunity. Social media is the mouthpiece through which the modern cause supporter shares his or her opinions. Warby Parker has figured out that having a two-way dialogue with fans provides the subtle nudge they need to loudly preach the "buy a pair, give a pair" mantra from the highest mountaintops of the web. Word of mouth is, after all, the best form of marketing, and as Qualman said in *Socialnomics*, Millennials love to brand themselves with social causes.

CONCLUSION

As Dan Pallotta asked in his article for *Forbes* magazine, "why can't we sell charity like we sell perfume?" Fundamentally, marketing a cause is doing the same thing as marketing a perfume: It is selling a feeling. Cause-driven organizations have long lagged behind traditional business in using marketing to grow and bring in revenue. Although the principle of equimarginality—investing in marketing until the last dollar spent brings in only a dollar of revenue—applies equally in the social sector and the business sector, other concerns have restricted the idea's implementation.

Many social sector workers feel that a dollar spent on administrative costs is a dollar taken away from running charitable programs. What they fail to realize is that an investment in marketing brings a return of *more* than 1:1—a fact that any underfunded organization should be excited to hear. The Kony 2012 campaign was widely criticized based on this line of thinking due to its relatively high costs, but in the end, every dollar that Invisible Children spent brought in four dollars in net revenue. A 400% return is excellent by any standard, and the investment gave Invisible Children the resources needed to vastly expand its work and services to those in LRA-affected areas. That being said, digital marketing can be vastly more cost-effective than traditional marketing, and as the Warby Parker case study discussed, a successful campaign can be run with the only cost being the time investment from employees. If the promise of a return is not enough to motivate some nonprofit organizations to invest in marketing, the promise of a nearly cost-free return should be.

In addition to the low-cost motive, digital marketing should be an attractive tool for cause-driven organizations for a number of other reasons. The ability to track anything and everything on the web through free tools like Google Analytics is unique to digital marketing. This possibility enables organizations to measure, refine, and improve their digital marketing efforts to ensure every dollar or hour of time spent is being put to the best possible use—a fact any donor, board member, or stakeholder in a cause-driven organization would be pleased to hear. Obama's digital campaign team was notorious for fine-tuning every aspect of their fundraising emails to bring in the maximum possible amount. In the end, their efforts brought in close to $700 million in online fundraising alone.

Timeliness is another advantage of digital marketing that cause-driven organizations have and should put to use. As mentioned, groups like the Red Cross have successfully used social media to provide continuous updates during times of emergency, simultaneously providing a valuable service and establishing their authority as a responder in times of disaster.

Last, but perhaps most valuable to cause-driven organizations, is the capacity of digital marketing to reach millions of potential activists, donors, or stakeholders at once while simultaneously personalizing and customizing their experience. Social media in particular is a great tool to engage with stakeholders, and as Warby Parker has shown, investing time and energy into conversing directly with your supporters will win loyalty and encourage them to introduce an organization to their extended network of friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances. Warby Parker has successfully capitalized on the opportunity Erik Qualman identified in *Socialnomics*: Millennials are eager to brand themselves with causes and socially responsible companies.

Cause-driven organizations should see digital marketing as a great opportunity to grow their presence and their programs. As this capstone has discussed, digital marketing overcomes many of the concerns cause-driven organizations have historically had with traditional marketing. If groups are able to implement the best practices analyzed in previous sections of this capstone, there may come a day soon when there are causes with brand identities as strong as those of the consumer products marketing has taught us to love, share, and associate with our own identities. As a field that is still relatively new and rapidly developing, it is likely that the digital tools and services available will only improve with time, and the cause-driven organizations that embrace this trend will quickly reap the benefits.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Digital marketing is a field that prides itself on candidness, fluidity, and timeliness. The majority of the sources I used for this capstone are digital in nature and, for this reason, may stray from the conventional idea of "academic" sources like peer-reviewed journals. Although I did use several very recently published books, a good number of my sources came from reputable blogs, electronic periodicals, and the direct web pages or social media accounts of cause-driven organizations. Digital marketing is a young and rapidly changing industry, especially in the area of social media, and thus, I chose to almost exclusively use sources published within the last three years. Most articles, books, or other research published before the late 2000s are already surprisingly out-of-date and, in some cases, irrelevant.

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