

The Advocacy Initiative

Workshop Report
Second Knowledge Exchange Forum
Dublin, 12 July 2012



#socialjusticemedia:
Lessons learned from e-advocacy

On 12 July 2012 over 100 social justice advocates met in Dublin to collectively reflect on their use of social **media** for social justice advocacy in Ireland. Delegates participated in eight workshops in two parallel sessions. The three key-note speeches at the Forum can be accessed on The Advocacy Initiative Website: <http://www.advocacyinitiative.ie/learn/tools/videoknowledge.html>.

Social media can be both a powerful tool and a time consuming diversion for social justice advocates. Internationally and in Ireland online advocacy has been used as an effective strategy for influencing change, but social media for social justice is not without its critics. Can digital strategies be counter-productive, alienating decision-makers and the public? Is e-advocacy an effective tool in raising awareness and changing minds? How inclusive is online networking for those living in poverty and social exclusion? How effectively do online petitions activate those interested in taking action for social change?

The top ten **#sjmedia** tips

- #1 **Think strategy then tools.** We are doing social justice advocacy not social media advocacy.
- #2 **Content is king.** But presentation really matters.
- #3 **Watch the cents and the minutes.** Social media can be labour intensive and it might be important to pay to get the set up right.
- #4 **Write it down.** Develop a robust social media policy which addresses the tools you use.
- #5 **Manage but don't control.** Work out how you want to balance the 'informal flow' with being coherent and on message.
- #6 **On the record.** Your content is public, be careful! Deletion can be an important strategy.
- #7 **Bring it all together.** Integrate your social media, but don't forget people use different tools.
- #8 **Lurk!** Follow others on Twitter, Facebook, blogs etc., learn protocols and find out what works.
- #9 **Hold your own.** Don't sacrifice your values and mission for social media, step back if something is not working.
- #10 **Engage.** Respond to constructive comments and feedback, but watch out for trolls and consider how best to react.

Workshop	What we have learned
<p>Facebook</p> <p>Facilitated by Helen Lowry, MRCI Input by Emmet McNally, Focus Ireland</p> <p><i>Facebook is a social networking service and website launched in February 2004. As of May 2012, Facebook has over 900 million active users, more than half of them using Facebook on a mobile device. There are over two million Facebook users in Ireland. Focus Ireland have over 100,000 likes on their Facebook page: http://www.facebook.com/focusirelandcharity</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facebook offers a new channel for social justice messages to reach a wider audience. - Facebook can be effectively linked to campaigns, though a minority of those connected will actually take action (lots of slacktivism out there!). - Facebook is not for everyone, it's a tool not a requirement. - Engage with other Facebook pages. - Develop an informal voice or personality, don't be boring! Tell stories and connect with your audience. - Try new approaches and new content, use videos and images even very simple ones. - Use the available Facebook tools. - Use negative comments, respond and engage. - Think about who are your administrators and how to ensure a coherent voice, while generating broad engagement across your organisation. - Encourage others to post, but manage this, remove spam as soon as possible. - Ask yourself, is Facebook the right tool? Facebook is more often used for personal use in Ireland, think about who you are trying to reach.
<p>Leveraging News Media</p> <p>Facilitated by Caroline Egan, Carmichael Centre Input by Audrey Deane, Society of St Vincent de Paul</p> <p><i>The SVP ran the school books campaign from May to July 2011, the campaign focused specifically on asking the Department of Education to be more directive and encourage schools to establish school book rental scheme. The campaign included a successful online petition. For more information: www.svp.ie</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The mainstream media is still critical in influencing and putting pressure on decision makers. - An effective social media campaign can build interest and air time across various media outlets, as well provide direct leverage with decision-makers. - Use online petitions to connect with a new audiences, ask for contact details, stay in touch and don't forget to ask for donations! - About half of visitors (19,000) to the SVP campaign site, signed the petition and one third of these agreed to receive future email from SVP. - Leverage your existing brand and credibility. - Produce high quality, clear content. - Understand that different journalists will have different priorities, target your content accordingly. - Have clear tangible 'asks'.

Blogging

Facilitated by Maria Hegarty, Equality Strategies

Input by Nat O'Connor, TASC

A blog is a discussion or information site published on the web. It contains discrete posts, usually displayed in chronological order, and often with the option of readers posting comments. Blogs can be very specific thematic sites, managed by one person or author, or can have multiple contributors or authors. TASC has established progressive-economy@tasc to provide a forum for progressive economists and others commenting on the Irish economy. Most contributors are members of the TASC Economists' Network.

- Be clear about your target audience and the purpose of the blog. Is it for a general audience? Does it provide facts and figures?
- There are plenty of technical suppliers of blog sites. A blog can be set up in minutes.
- Blogs are labour intensive, it can be useful to share a blog with other organisations.
- Mainstream media do access blogs to generate content, though often material from blogs is not attributed.
- Blogs can be a useful way of testing the waters, exploring issues which are not central to your organisation or work plan, but might prove critical (having a different name separates the blog from your organisation).
- Don't get too hung up, blogs are informal there is no need to agonise over every word.
- Think about who your bloggers are. Can you line up a series of blogs on the same or different themes?
- Think of strategies to disseminate your blog and draw people to it. Link it to other tools such as RSS feeds, Twitter etc.
- Expect (hope for) and prepare for lots of two way communication.
- Think about your presentation, use pictures and catchy titles.

Mobile

Facilitated by Senan Turnbull

Input by Oisín O'Reilly, Belong To Youth Services

The aim of the Belong To campaign was to 'to create positive understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people and their issues'. The intention was to engage an online audience with the realities of a LGBT young person. The audience were asked to put their mobile phone numbers into an interactive video. For more information see: <http://www.standup.ie>

- Text message campaigns can be costly, it is important to negotiate prices with the telecoms companies, who may take a substantial proportion of a mobile phone donation.
- Similar output is achievable on a lower cost base using 'in-kind' donations and volunteers, however a longer lead in time would be needed.
- There was a high conversion rate from those who engaged with the campaign to donations, which helped to offset the considerable costs of this approach.
- Difficult to measure the impact of this campaign element on attitudes, particularly as it was linked to other activities such as workshops in schools, street teams, etc.
- It was important to have the personalised elements of the campaign, however these did cause concern for some people and Belong To updated elements of the campaign e.g. with reassuring message about sharing a mobile phone number.
- Consumer/donor trust in Premium Rate Text Messaging is low.
- There were some technical limitations (e.g building the video with Flash limited it to non-Apple devices, using a hosted video rather than You Tube can limit dissemination).

Video

Facilitated by Sheila Nordon, ICTR
Input by Diarmuid O'Sullivan, Older and Bolder

In 2010 Older and Bolder ran a campaign to protect the state pension. They produced a video as part of that campaign, and the video ended with an invitation to sign a petition. The campaign was a huge success, with 5000 signing the petition.

<http://www.olderandbolder.ie/content/sign-our-petition-defend-state-pension>

- Video can be extremely effective at delivering an emotive message and provoking responses.
- Video can reach a broad range of demographic groups, across all age categories.
- Develop an online infrastructure to back up your video, link these to broader organisational objectives and welcome and use comments even critical ones.
- Video is a visual representation, make sure that it respects your mandate and ethos and does not contribute to stereotypes. Resist the urge to be sensationalist for the sake of the tool.
- Videos don't always make sense for an advocacy campaign, think carefully about their purpose.
- There are ways of cost effectively producing videos, but try to maintain quality production.

Email

Facilitated by John-Mark McCafferty, SVP
Input by Oisin Coughlan, Friends of the Earth

'Friends of the Earth' is a part of an international federation and campaigns for environmental justice and sustainability. Strong record on using online tools to facilitate email campaigns. For more information: <http://www.foe.ie>

- FOE has never sent emails to all TDs at the same time but constructed the website in the way that people could find their TD by the constituency and contact their government representative directly.
- It is important to change the subject line of emails as the government system can recognise repeats email subjects and divert them to a separate folder.
- Most effective strategy is to let people write their own emails to TDs rather than use the template, though there can be a hesitance about doing this.
- Emails play a role but follow up by phone or in person is always needed.
- Don't send HTML emails, text only emails are safest.
- Know who you are asking to send emails, don't exhaust your supporters, break up your lists into groups that are more likely to take action on specific issues.
- Think about your audience, large numbers of emails are not longer as impactful as they once were, but still an important role for strategic use of emails.
- Mail Chimp and Vertical Response are good email management tools.

Twitter

Facilitated by Rachel Mullen, Equality and Rights Alliance
Input by Frances Byrne, OPEN

Tistooyoung is a campaign by OPEN, Barnardos, and the NWCI which opposed Section Four of the Social Welfare & Pensions Bill 2012. For more information see: <http://oneparent.ie/7-is-too-young>

- Twitter is a useful tool, but not everyone uses it, so need to think carefully about who does and how it can be used to get their attention.
- Good place to mobilise politicians, journalists and other organisations.
- It's very important to respond to tweets and retweets, and to thank those who engage. This can be time consuming, and sometimes a generic response is the best way to go.
- There are tools out there which help to manage twitter, such as Tweet Reach, Tweet Deck. @damienmulley often tweets about new social media resources.
- There are lots of mistakes you can make: direct messages are not private, not knowing how to reply, think about how others will read your tweet. Double meanings are dangerous territory!
- Think about tone. Twitter can be very informal, give a lot of thought to your style, how personal are your interactions, whose voice is represented. Be clear if tweets are personal, professional or both.
- Make yourself available.
- Be brave and don't be afraid to challenge, remember it's a conversation.
- Social justice outcomes are much slower than Twitter!

Emerging Tools

Facilitated by Eugene Flynn
Input by Caroline Egan.

- There are lots of tools, many with different users.
- Twitter and Facebook are still emerging tools for social justice advocates.
- Use analysis tools like Google analytics, to find out who you are reaching and what most interests them.
- Increasingly more and more people are accessing the internet through their mobile phones – think about this in designing websites and other content.

Linked In is a professional networking site which allows users to make contacts within a particular sector. Useful in making contacts and networking.

Pinterest is a content sharing service that allows members to "pin" images, videos and other objects to their pinboard.

Google Plus is an amalgamation of services we already use and a competitor to Facebook.

HootSuite allows you to connect and manage multiple social networks from one website.

Drupal is a free software package that allows you to easily organise, manage and publish content.

Google AdWords are a sponsored links section next to search results which help to boost website traffic. Can be very cost effective, as expenditure can be limited.