Social Media Plan

Social media platforms, including the two most popular sites Twitter and Facebook, have been increasingly used as an important venue for different types of organizations to promote their work and connect with communities. For [Company A], social media participation presents an opportunity to increase your profile with current and future clients, increase awareness surrounding your work, reach out further to the communities you are working with, and engage with users with similar interests, goals and projects. One of [Company A]'s most important achievements and ongoing goals is the development of "open source tools for change" and social media is one of the best mediums to live up to this part of your mandate.

After extensive consultation with the [Company A] team, it appears that there is enough interest in using social media as a tool to promote the organization as a whole as well as the work that you are doing. While there is an understandable hesitation on some levels, this recommendation does come with guidelines for social media use.

In addition to this consultation, research looking at how similar organizations to [Company A] are using social media sites like Twitter and Facebook to engage with audiences and promote their work has been undertaken (please see "Social Media and Website Comparison.") Considering both the consultation and additional research, the following guidelines for social media engagement have been developed.

Recommendations:

- o Start with one social media platform and then consider branching out later. I recommend using Twitter to start with the process of audience engagement, and if the organization feels like this is a successful venture in 3-4 months, consider adding a Facebook page.

- o It is important to start social media with an understanding that this is a new daily activity. Integrating your social media presence with your day to day practices will encourage the development of a workplace culture that values this form of external communications.

- o Identify 2-3 individuals on the [Company A] team who could commit an amount of time (probably about 1 hour each per week) on updating the Twitter account, including posting, following individuals and organizations, responding to messages and replies and other maintenance that leads to an active and vibrant Twitter account.

o Be sure to promote your social media presence. Consider your Twitter account to be an extension of your website, and add your Twitter handle to email signatures across the organization, ensure the account is promoted on the website and newsletter, and add it to business cards, bids and any other forms of communication that might be appropriate.

o Devote time monthly to tracking statistics for click-throughs, looking at the number of followers gained (or lost) in a given month, the frequency that your tweets are retweeted and other relevant numbers regarding engagement. This will help to guide you in future best practices as well as guide an evolving social media strategy.

o Remember that social media is not the be-all, end-all of communication but is one avenue that will compliment other forms of external communications.

Getting the Most Out of Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging site that is used by individuals, corporations, not-for-profits and many other types of organizations to engage with other users and create conversations. Posts are limited to 140 characters and frequently include links to content outside of Twitter. This social media platform contains many features that allow users to connect. Features include:

- Hashtags: this is a word or a phrase (with no spaces) preceded by the pound symbol (#socialchange) which acts as a subject search function for users, and compiles tweets containing that hashtag.

- Retweets: Users can also retweet (repost) other's updates to their own account. These then show up in your followers' timeline with the original poster's avatar (picture) and message with the words "retweeted by @CompanyA" below the message.

- Reply: Twitter users can also reply to a user with their name (Hey, @CompanyAPrez, thanks for that great link on #hashtag!), which links your followers to that account and notifies the quoted user that they have been mentioned in a tweet.

- Direct messages (or DM): These are private, direct messages to other users. Direct messages can be useful if you have something short to say to another user that doesn't need to be on the public record, or is not of general interest, but directed only at one user.

- Lists: lists that compile the tweets of a select group of users. For example, @CompanyA could create a list devoted solely to [high profile client], add individuals and groups who post frequently about related topics and make this list public. This allows users to subscribe to the same list, adding value to users and demonstrating a commitment to this subject.

Some quick statistics from Twitter (as of September 2011)

- Twitter now has 100 million active users every month
- 50 million users every day
- 200 million registered users
- The number of Twitter users logging in every month is up by 82% since the beginning of the year
- 55 million users log in to Twitter from their phone or tablet each month

- Twitter.com receives 400 million visitors a month
- Twitter.com visitor growth is up 60% this year
- 40% of Twitter users don't tweet every month but watch others tweet
- Projected growth by the end of the year is an additional 26 million users
- Twitter hosts approximately one billion tweets every 5 days
- Twitter has set a new record for tweets per second of 8,900 (TPS)

For [Company A], a Twitter account creates an opportunity to promote the work that you are doing in the community (and the province), show stakeholders the high level of activity you achieve, and show momentum and progress in your work. This platform also creates a greater presence for [Company A] in the public sphere and presents an opportunity for networking with potential partners and improving your public image.

Twitter Accounts

Based on feedback and to create the most visibility, [Company A] should maintain three Twitter accounts – one general account, and one for the president of [Company A] and one for the vice-president of [Company A]. The two latter accounts should be considered personal accounts that are tied to [Company A]. These accounts are free to be "political", that is to make statements about current politics, public figures or other items that make sense and encourage a view of [president] and [vice-president] as the public face of [Company A]. [president] and [vice-president]'s account profiles should each include a disclaimer that says "my tweets reflect my own opinions" and should follow Best Practices, below.

The third account (@CompanyA) is devoted primarily to sharing news, updates about [Company A], current projects (or past projects as they become relevant in the news) and other items primarily related to [Company A].

Twitter Content:

Creating quality content is one of the most valuable and effective methods for maintaining a positive, well-respected and well-followed Twitter account. Studies have shown that account maintenance posts such as "good morning, Twitter!" or "have a great weekend" are considered on par with spam and should be avoided in order not to annoy followers. Links to news, events, or blog posts are some of the richest content, and will position @CompanyA as a valuable source of information within the fields of social justice, community engagement, environmental and labour activism amongst other areas that you may find yourself tweeting about.

Topics might include:

- Current projects: We are off to a focus group for @ClientAccount. Looking forward to input from #newcomers.

- News: Councillors and residents locked out of #TTC meeting gather in Committee Room 1 #topoli

- Links to blog or content on [Company A] website: #Bedbugs are a serious pain as well as a #publichealth problem. Read more on what to do if you get bedbugs: http://companyA/blog/bedbugs

- Links to other websites/clients: @CompanyA worked with @NewClient to study #newcomer access to #healthcare. Read the report: http://whatever.com/report.

- Retweets: Remember to come to this Rally to Defend a Harm Reduction Shelter! This Wednesday @5pm! http://www.facebook.com/events/3104/ #stopthecuts #topoli

The [Company A] Twitter account can critically engage with current politics and events, but are encouraged to remain partisan and NEVER engage on attacks on individuals. [Company A] should also avoid using auto-responders or other content that lacks personality. This will result in diminished engagement and followers.

[Company A President] has indicated that he feels that there are no projects that are "off limits" to tweet about. It would still be a good practice, even casually, to ask new clients if they are comfortable with [Company A] tweeting about any work or progress on specific projects. This could even be framed as asking for their Twitter handle so that you can tweet about your project with them.

Best Practices for Twitter

- The [Company A] Twitter account should be updated at least 3 days per week (5-10 times per week is ideal) and multiple posts per day are encouraged.

- Posts should strive to include at least one hashtag or at least one mention of another Twitter user through the @ symbol or a link to outside content. This is not always possible and should not be forced, but is a standard to consider.

- Creating a well-crafted and evolving list of those whom [Company A] is following is vital to the success of the [Company A] Twitter account. The first three months will likely include following back almost everyone who follows Twitter. After this initial time period, the followers list can be crafted to more specifically reflect your own interests and affiliations.

- [Company A] should make use of the lists feature whenever possible. Some possible lists include: "clients", "social justice" "environmental activists" "Ontario labour". Add individuals or organizations working/tweeting frequently within these areas or topics and be sure to make these lists public so that other users can subscribe.

- Twitter isn't all about text. Sign up for a Twitter photo sharing service like Yfrog (http://yfrog.com/) or Instagram (http://instagram.com/) to facilitate easy photo-sharing over Twitter. This could include pictures from events, meetings or other images relevant to [Company A] and your followers and clients.

- Remember that proper spelling and grammar should be strived for while posting on Twitter, but it is occasionally acceptable to use short form, abbreviations, numbers to stand in 4 words, and poor grammar in order to make a point within the available character limit. For example: @Company A had the pleasure of working w/ @NewClient on report abt #healthcare access: http://whatever.com/report.

- With that said: be sure to double-check spelling and links before posting.

- Use Twitter as a tool for conversation and engagement. Don't just stick to reports, but also ask questions and create conversations. Respond to other's questions and opinions and engage in respectful dialogue. Reading and responding to what your followers have to say is just as important as posting.

- Closely monitor any mentions of @CompanyA, and be sure to thank for retweets when appropriate, retweet mentions other users make of @CompanyA when appropriate, and respond quickly to questions and concerns.

- It is possible (though unlikely) that @CompanyA could incur negative comments or mentions on Twitter. Handling this gracefully is important, and usually, should not be ignored. When the message is coming from an understandably upset person or someone who is seeking dialogue, it is important to respond respectfully and quickly. It is possible to receive negative comments from an individual who is simply trolling (looking for negative attention) and there are rare cases where ignoring a user may be the best strategy.

<u>Twitter Tools</u>

Twitter can be updated both through the online platform (at Twitter.com), through tools, or through mobile devices (in conjunction with apps or directly at the website). It is recommended that the individual(s) assigned responsibility for maintaining the Twitter account make use of mobile technology (if available) to be able to tweet away from the office and to update with relevant news or events in real time.

It is highly recommended that @_publicinterest make use of tools for managing the Twitter account. These apps allow for more efficient posting and reading. Some options include:

- **Buffer**: (http://bufferapp.com/) *(best plan for [Company A]: $10 per month for 2 account managers, up to 50 posts buffered at a time)*
  From their website: We designed Buffer to offer you a both personal and yet more efficient solution to handle sharing on social media. Buffer makes your life easier with a smarter way to schedule the great content you find. Fill up your Buffer at one time in the day and Buffer automagically posts them for you through the day. Simply keep that Buffer topped up to have a consistent social media presence all day round, all week long.

- **Hootsuite** (http://hootsuite.com) *(pro plan is $5.99 per month)*
  Hootsuite will allow you to schedule tweets (up to 50 at a time), track clicks, see statistics, use on mobile devices (iPad, iPhone, Blackberry, Android) on a customizable dashboard. Although this is a cheaper option than Buffer, it is probably more complicated than [Company A] needs.

- **Tweetdeck** (http://tweetdeck.com) *(free)*
  Available in several different formats and can be used as an app through Google Chrome, through the web, as a direct app on a PC or Mac, or on mobile devices. Tweetdeck also allows for scheduling tweets, and is an excellent tool for reading, allowing for filters, and multi-panel/subject reading. As this tool is free, it may be a good option to try out first.

For further information about best practices and strategy, please see:
http://www.netwitsthinktank.com/social-media/20-tips-for-nonprofits-using-twitter.htm