

ECFI Action Learning - Digital Transformation



Northamptonshire Community
Foundation, UK -

How to use social media to engage
with new and prospective donors

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Mary Hollands, Northamptonshire Community Foundation

Our digital transformation challenge

Due to the pandemic and subsequent restrictions/lockdowns, meeting with both existing and prospective donors was all but impossible. Prior to March 2020, our donor care heavily involved meetings in person with donors at events and on a one-to-one basis which stopped abruptly when the UK went into a national lock down. We therefore needed to quickly adapt and learn how to engage with donors and prospective donors in a virtual way. Furthermore, we wanted to explore how we currently use our social media and to investigate new styles of digital communication, including the use of targeted social media marketing to encourage younger and more diverse donors to support the work of the foundation.

If we hadn't created a Digital Transformation Strategy, we would have struggled to engage with our donors and wider audience during the pandemic. Social media and other tools for digital communication such as Zoom have proved essential over the last 12 months as a way of keeping in touch and sharing our work/achievements with anyone external to NCF.

Looking ahead, we know that younger donors make connections with charities / organisations at a young age (early -mid-twenties) and we therefore need to make sure we are speaking their language, where they are listening. Research shows that younger people use Facebook and Instagram as their primary social media channels, so we have chosen to focus our work on these platforms as well as LinkedIn, a business to business platform.

Our solution

We created a Digital Transformation Strategy that would change the way we communicated to external audiences online and stay connected with donors and funded groups. The long term effect of implementing our Digital Transformation Strategy will be engaging with a new audience via digital channels such as social media and our website, meaning we will have an additional stream of introductions to the foundation, alongside in-person referrals.

We will be able to share our work with a new, younger and more diverse group of donors and help them to achieve their philanthropic goals, which in turn will enable us to achieve our mission and vision.

This strategy involves:

Online Community Conversations

We have found that through our work on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) that by providing the opportunity to connect online via the zoom platform we have been able to bring together donors, funded group and local partners and citizens to discuss the challenges and solutions locally to tackling the global goals. This has helped us stay connected with donors and groups as well as supporting collaborative working. We will continue to do so.

The use of storytelling

We know that storytelling is crucial for inspiring action as it can evoke feelings and emotions in the reader, allowing them to see what we get to see every day - making the statistics real. What's more, a story about an individual or family needing support would feel far more accomplishable to a reader/donor than a statistic of 100 families.

Writing in an emotive manner

Alongside the use of stories, we have begun to write our social media posts in a more emotive way and always include a call to action for the reader.

We have plans to develop each individual social media platform we use, focusing on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Takeaways from the action learning process

One of the key takeaways has been the peer to peer learning and support we had access to through the working group. The bi-weekly calls gave us an opportunity to think strategically and long term which was a refreshing break from the emergency appeal work that dominated much of the last year. Furthermore, we learnt a lot from other members of the groups including how to run successful online events and have been introduced to new online platforms we can utilise in the future. We really enjoyed being involved with ECFI and the other community foundations and are grateful to have had the opportunity.

Issues that remain unresolved

We haven't needed to change the approach to the strategy, but we have had to amend our timescales as this is a large, organisation wide communications change that will take longer to fully implement than first realised. Our aim is to have fully adopted the strategy into our working practices by the 31st December, 2021.

The strategy is an ongoing piece of work that involves organisational change so embedding this into our day to day work will take time, hence why we have moved our planned date of completion to the end of the year. We know there will be a lot for us still to learn and the strategy will be updated throughout the year to reflect this.

Find out more about the Northamptonshire Community Foundation here:

<http://www.ncf.uk.com/>