



Social Distancing does not need to mean social isolation: Facebook Groups is a Key tool for Community Continuity

By Allison Cohen

As social distancing and sheltering in place continues to be the norm, creating digital connections and community is key to keeping our organizations vibrant. Facebook groups have been rapidly increasing in popularity, because they work to build deep connections between members and organizations, create brand awareness and offer increased opportunities for engagement, at all times.

As we move through uncharted territories of marketing, fundraising and communicating with our supporters, Facebook Groups effectively positions your organization as a resource, and builds loyalty and trust with your base. How do you make a them feel cared for and valued digitally?

If you watched the Super Bowl, you most likely saw the Facebook Groups ad, the beginning of the platforms push towards Groups. Facebook Groups have built in tools that make it easy to manage and create a comfortable place for interaction, unlike a Facebook Page.

Here is a quick primer on what makes Facebook Groups a great choice for creating digital community and how to start.

- Security: Groups offer different levels of security – public, private, private/non-searchable (invite only). Private groups offer a sense of exclusivity, as well as ensuring the like-mindedness of members.
- Levels of Admin/Moderation: Managing a Facebook Group can be a major undertaking. Group moderation offers an opportunity to engage different levels of leadership (and volunteers) in community management and content creation.
- Admins can decide that all posts are approved before posting or have a more open posting policy.
- Group rules: One of the most important aspects of a successful Facebook Group is to create the right rules and enforce them. This is how you set the tone and culture, just like you do in person. Clear rules lead to meaningful, high-level conversation. Many include no direct solicitation, respect everyone's privacy and only respectful (or no) political commentary. Your group should be a welcoming and safe place for members to engage.

- Shared resources: There are systems in place for the admin/moderators to go 'live' in a group, create files and units (class type materials) and share other resource.

Nurturing and growing a Facebook group serves your organization and its members.

Give members visibility: Members want to feel welcome and accepted. Spotlight your group members, celebrate them and encourage connections between members. Recognize contributors and invite them to take on leadership roles with the community. Facebook Groups offers badges that automatically reward participation (like Conversation Starter and Visual Storyteller). Recognize the members that reach these levels participation.

Create Loyalty and Trust: An active, effective online community inspires authenticity, vulnerability and support. Lead by example – share stories and respond in ways that encourages others to feel empowered to do the same. Continually express gratitude and share what you (as an organization) have learned from the group. Invite others to do the same.

Set rules to create balance: Review your rules and share guidelines with consideration to providing an authentic member experience. Don't be afraid to set boundaries and enforce them. Consider how others can benefit from the connections in the group without creating room for spam. Encourage thought diversity and respectful debate.

The ultimate value Facebook Groups are delivering is HUMAN CONNECTION.

Use this tool as a way for serving your community, keeping them engaged with your organization and with like-minded people. For many living alone, this can be a lifeline in these trying times. The value of your community extends far beyond the walls of your office, and those that you serve.

Need help getting started? These are the six types of posts proven to build engagement. Fuel your Facebook group by posting one of these a day.

1. **DECISION POSTS:** This gives you the opportunity to leverage your community provide an answer to a simple question you may have about, well, anything. This is an easy way to boost engagement.

2. **OPINION POSTS:** Best for quick questions, you can use this to seed new offerings, change the tone of the group or prime an idea to see if there is interest. (Hint: don't use the built-in poll feature, it doesn't hit the algorithm for engagement)

3. **COMMUNITY POST:** Share a story and give your audience permission to do the same. It may also be called the commiserate post in times like these.

4. CAN'T HELP THEMSELVES: Ask people to help you celebrate, identify themselves, something they can't help but answer

5. AUTHORITY BUILDING: share your expertise, weigh in on what's happening on the page, reinforce your position as the community leader.

6. ASK: This is where you consistently tell people what you do and what you sell. This may seem obvious but so many people forget about it and it's important.

Invite us in. We look forward to seeing how you translate your leadership to a digital community.

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