

The Effects of Social Media on Not-For-Profits

Kylie Pearce

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Mr. John Anderson, Faculty Adviser

For the past six months, I have had the privilege to work with a devoted group of people at HoLa Hora Latina. This local not-for-profit is a volunteer-based, art, cultural, and educational organization that promotes a sense of belonging for Latinos in the Knoxville and East Tennessee area. The group also tries to build bridges with the community as a whole. The group sponsors many activities throughout the year, including the HoLa Festival in October. While my main role was to manage the social media aspect, I helped in many different areas.

My Roles

My first task was to tackle the group's Facebook page. While there were many posts by the director, the page did not generate many member responses. Together with the director, we decided to make a new page dedicated solely to the HoLa Festival and to concentrate on methods to promote "jabber" on both pages. We accomplished this by utilizing multiple postings by multiple people. Since members now had all the Festival information in one location, their interest was piqued as they were able to ask specific Festival questions without having to weed through the clutter of other pages. As a result, the group quickly surpassed 100 members.

Since HoLa Hora Latina also wanted to access a younger and more tech savvy demographic, the next task was to utilize Twitter. We set up an account and had two followers in the first two days. As we began to follow more groups, more groups began to follow us. We installed links to the Twitter page on both the Facebook pages and the main HoLa webpage. The greatest accomplishments were when our posts were retweeted by followers. During this process, our director was contacted by Mutual of Omaha's Aha Moment team asking for a video to enter their contest honoring devoted citizens and their special projects. Mutual of Omaha advertised our video on their Twitter which provided vital exposure for our group. Our moment was chosen as one of the top 75, and we were able to benefit from the acknowledgment.

In addition to Facebook and Twitter, I set up a blog on WordPress. We enabled it to show our past five Tweets on the sidebar. The WordPress system tracks how many views, followers, which posts have been read the most, and what webpage directs readers to our blog. This proved to be invaluable information in focusing our efforts. We have had over 650 views in the few months it has been in use. The best reference was from Doctora Aliza, a member of Univision since 1989. Her website offers healthy eating and living advice, as well as medical information, to the Spanish-speaking community. She read my post entitled “Unity in the Community,” which discussed the community’s support for our newest event, the Rice and Beans Healthy and Tasty Cooking Contest. Because she was so impressed by both HoLa’s and Knoxville’s efforts, she wanted to post the healthiest recipe on her website for the world to see. This was such a great boost for HoLa! Please see the attached blog statistics and letter from Doctora Aliza for more information.

In the months leading up to the Festival, there were other events with which I helped. I was a part of the meeting between HoLa representatives and UT Directors to discuss how UT and HoLa can collaborate in the future to promote Hispanic Heritage Month on campus. I also was a part of a live interview on Knoxville’s show “11 O’Clock Rock.” The biggest project outside the HoLa Festival was the Rice and Beans Cooking Contest. I called businesses to ask for prize donations and wrote several press releases about the contest and other Hispanic Heritage Month events. In addition, I coordinated the volunteers for the day of the contest and helped with set up and logistics. The contest was a huge success for its first year and will hopefully continue to grow in years to come!

Key Takeaways

This process was a tremendous learning experience that will no doubt prove very useful in my future working environments. Some of the most important things I learned are:

1. The Importance of Diversity

“Diversity” has become the newest business buzzword. It is heard in presentations, read about in textbooks, and published in articles. With all the talk about it, it is easy to set it aside as the newest fad. Yet, I witnessed it first hand these past six months. So many new ideas, processes, and concepts come from a diverse group. An organization without diversity becomes stagnant.

2. Communication is Key

Greater diversity can sometimes bring the possibility for more problems as there are many different assumptions when working with people from other cultures. For instance, within the Hispanic culture, the importance of time and deadlines is not stressed to the degree that it is in the United States. From previous projects, however, I have learned that expectations must be clearly stated from the outset. Consequently, it must be made clear what cultural norms are being followed prior to the beginning of a project.

3. Downplay Pre-Assumptions and Stereotypes

While prevalent, preconceived notions and stereotypes only hurt interactions. For example, often Latinos are all grouped together, with no differentiation. This is not true at all. Every country has its own people, customs, food, music, dance, and celebrations. They differ even within the same country. Not recognizing these differences spells disaster for businesses and citizens in general.

4. Think Outside the Box

Working with a not-for-profit was wonderful. In class, we always operate under the assumption that we work for a big company with a large budget to market our goods or services. However, this real-life situation was a polar opposite. HoLa does not have a large marketing and advertising budget as that money can best be used towards actual events and projects. Therefore, I had to think of new and creative ways to get the information to the community without spending a lot of money. Facebook and Twitter definitely helped, as well as the local newspapers. One of the team members contacted Knox ivi about participating with their webcasts to spread the word. Also, we tried to work with businesses on Market Square to help promote our Rice and Beans Cooking Contest by having them feature a special lunch or drink menu for the afternoon. Through these efforts, I learned that there are endless possibilities which do not involve spending mass amounts of money.

Suggestions for HoLa Hora Latina

1. Actively Pursue New Technology

These past few months have opened new doors and opportunities for HoLa in terms of free publicity, including Mutual of Omaha's Twitter mentions and Doctora Aliza's acknowledgment of our blog. As the organization moves forward, it is imperative for it to continue to harness new technology as it becomes available. Never shy away just because no one in the group is familiar with it. The best way to learn is through experience.

2. Clearly and Quickly Delineate Responsibilities

For many of the projects I worked on, I was unsure of what exactly was expected of me. Also, there were many times when I got pulled in at the last minute to a project because no one ever said they would complete it. I know it is hard with a volunteer-based organization to always

have someone to help, but I feel that compiling a list of projects and their deadlines early on in the process will help with efficiency.

3. Regularly Post New Blogs

Almost instantly, the blog was gaining readers and earning comments. In order to keep the same level of enthusiasm and support, it is critical to continue to post with some regularity. It is better to pick a day to post and stick to it. This way it becomes a part of readers' routines, and they are not continually checking for a new post only to be disappointed. Also, make sure and have a variety of post topics. This increases readership and keeps the blog from becoming dull or just an extension of the current website. Follow through with the YWCA's offer of a blog collaboration to gain new readers and increase current readership.