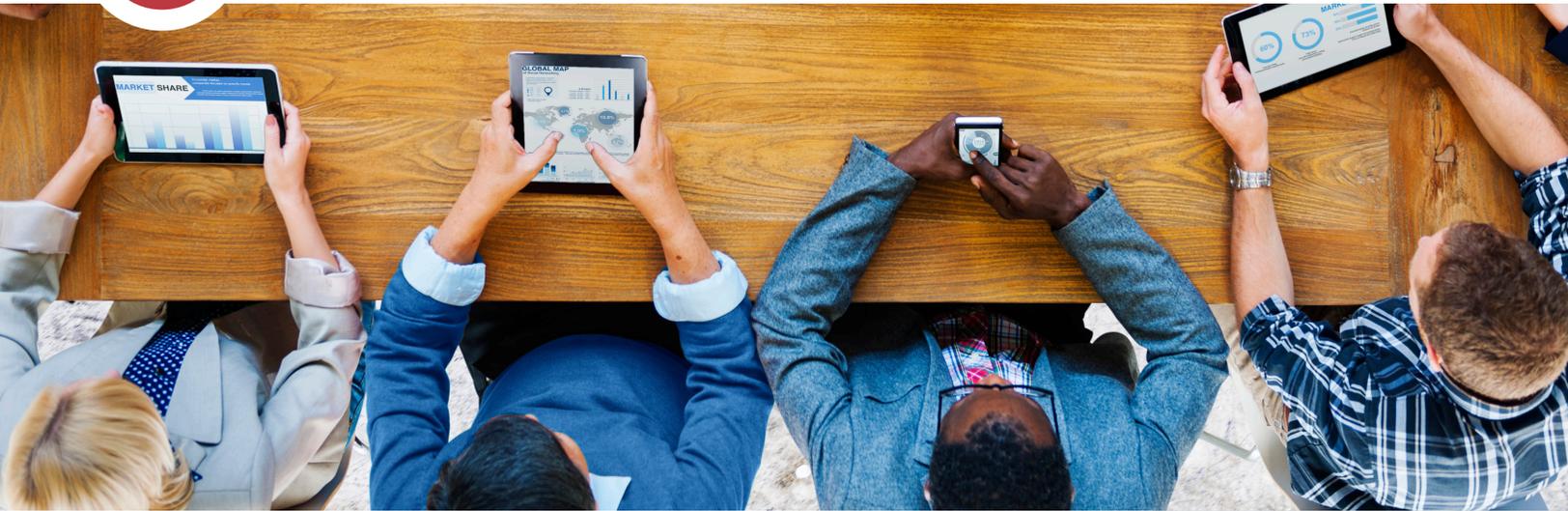




**How to Leverage Your Marketing  
and Social Media Efforts:  
Try These 8 Steps to Drive Your  
Technical Association to Success**

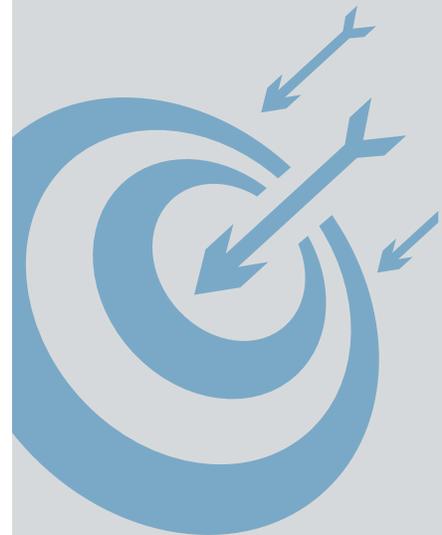




## 8 Steps to Drive Your Technical Association to Success

You probably engage in marketing and social media efforts on a regular basis. But if you're simply sending out announcements and posting updates on the fly and are not using them as part of a broader, targeted strategy, you could be missing out on some valuable benefits. When used to their full advantage, marketing and social media (today this also includes mobile applications) can play a critical role to help your technical association to improve visibility in your industry, attract more "active" members, create and promote new or improved standards, and gain increased support for your mission. The key is to focus on specific goals and not cast your net too broadly. This guide presents some essential steps to help you most effectively leverage marketing and social media as the building blocks of your organization's growth journey.

1. Understand the Value of Marketing and Social Media
2. Start with the Endpoint in Mind
3. Create a Solid Marketing Plan
4. Leverage Your Social Media Connections
5. Realize Less Is More When Selecting Social Media Platforms
6. Remember That Slow and Steady Wins the Race
7. Incorporate These Best Practices to Enhance Your Efforts
8. Avoid These Common Mistakes



## 1. Understand the Value of Marketing and Social Media

Your association is making great strides with its efforts, but in order to move to the next level, now you have to figure out how to connect with people who will truly care about your accomplishments. A solid marketing plan is essential to reach your target audience, and, over time, to develop a solid relationship with them.

To help you think broadly and understand the power of social media, consider the array of long-term benefits that social media can bring to your organization, such as:

- **Building your reputation:** Your social media strategy can go a long way toward helping to establish your reputation by connecting you with your target audience so that you can show the value you bring to the table. You can use a variety of social media platforms to communicate with specific groups of people who care about the issues you work on or the information and viewpoint you can provide, and you can also establish your association as a thought leader in the field. Just be sure that your content is optimized not only for online channels and to be captured by the search engines, but also for mobile devices, since a growing number of people now access key information from their smartphones or other hand-held electronic devices.
- **Sparking meaningful conversation:** You can develop well-written blogs or posts about current topics, research, policies, or events on a regular schedule to enhance your group's presence. Always try to solicit feedback and comments from others to start meaningful conversations and debates.
- **Attracting new members:** When you contribute worthwhile content online, your audience will be happy to like, share, or repost your tweets, status, or blog entries with their own social networks, which is a surefire way to get new, qualified membership leads.
- **Networking:** Social media enables you to form connections with other groups that have similar interests and goals. This can be another way to further your impact while meeting more people who might be interested in your group's efforts. When networking, look for other organizations and groups that have a large number of followers and active conversations.
- **Creating a strong brand identity:** When you use social media strategically, you'll be building a solid presence in the search results. This is another way to help grow your reach with a broader target audience, while at the same time managing your reputation by making sure that there is enough positive information about your organization for the search engines to capture. An added bonus is that when you develop a strong presence, any negative stories that arise will be less likely to stick.

### Connect with your target audience:

You can use a variety of social media platforms to communicate with specific groups of people who care about the issues you work on or the information and viewpoint you can provide, and you can also establish your association as a thought leader in the field.



## 2. Start with the Endpoint in Mind

Now that you recognize the power social media can bring to your efforts, you need to develop a solid marketing plan that can serve as a roadmap to lead you to your destination. Therefore, it's always wise to start by defining measurable goals up front (such as growing your membership, raising more funds, or increasing traffic to your website), and then identify all of the steps that lead to these objectives.

As you move forward with your plans, you can also track a variety of key performance indicators (KPIs), which can help you measure the impact of your efforts. This can provide a concrete way to define your starting point, track your progress, and compare yourself to your competitors. For instance, you might follow the results of a social media campaign to drive traffic to your website and quantify the effectiveness of the approach.

With paid social media efforts, you'll want to show measurable success in the form of specifics like conversions and ROI. Just remember that not all of your social media impact will translate into dollars and cents. This is because some variables, such as your branding value, positive reputation, and brand sentiment, don't have a monetary value up front, but rather, their impact may build over time and will ultimately help you accomplish your goals.

## 3. Create a Solid Marketing Plan

The most effective marketing plans today include a mix of both traditional and social media efforts. Establishing the right balance depends a lot on your association's focus, goal(s), resources, and membership. That being said, today most savvy organizations are relying increasingly heavily on social media avenues for the bulk of their promotional efforts.

One important way to maximize your digital marketing plan is by using a staggered approach called sequence marketing. As the name implies, this is a sequence of digital projects that map people to your organization. This can be done through a steady stream of high-quality content (think press releases, social media posts, emails, ads, authored articles and blogs, white papers, and case studies) that initially strives to meet people's needs for information or to address some specific question or interest they have. Then the content continues to build over time, thus developing a relationship. When used to its full advantage, sequence marketing content should improve your visibility and capture the search engines effectively.

With sequence marketing and other marketing approaches, it's crucial that when you direct people to your website, you offer a well-developed landing page that is simple and easy to follow and has a clear call to action.

It's also essential that you have some type of evaluation or measurement component in place so that you will know if your efforts are having the desired results. Some of the specific areas you can track to calculate the return on your investment include your reach, your website visits, leads, conversions, content downloads, and revenue.

### Try sequence marketing:

This is a steady stream of high-quality content that initially strives to meet people's needs for information or to address some specific question or interest they have. Then the content continues to build over time, thus developing a relationship.



## 4. Leverage Your Social Media Connections

If you're like most people, you probably check your Facebook and Twitter accounts regularly to stay in touch with your social networks. Professional groups can get similar benefits by leveraging these and other popular social media platforms in the most effective way. Your social media strategy in the 21st century needs to revolve around building quality **relationships** and attracting people who might want to get involved in your efforts. One simple way to do this is by posting social media updates, since these can be done in real time and usually have little or no cost involved. You can also call on your members and others to ask questions, share lessons learned, and lend their own perspectives to add further relevance and value to your social media channels and make followers feel more connected to you.

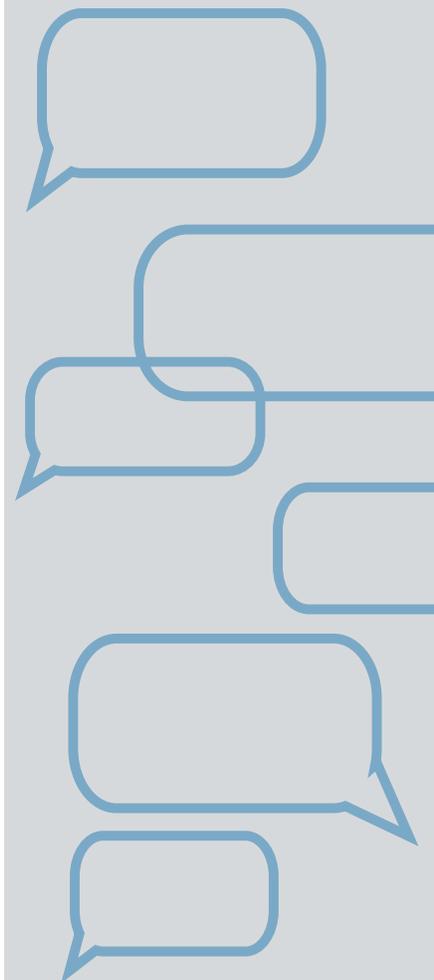
Hashtags are also a great tool to differentiate yourself and express what is unique about your association and your events or work. You can use them on various social media platforms to help your posts stand out and make them easy to follow. In addition, they provide a great way to organize conversations. You can also broaden your reach by incorporating photos and videos in your hashtag posts and conversations.

Beyond communicating with friends and perspective members in these ways, savvy associations also extend their social media networking beyond their friends and target audience to look at the competition to keep an eye on their efforts. For instance, you can follow their posts to see what they are up to and learn from their efforts to adapt them in the most relevant way for your own strategy. You can also friend other groups and associations with a similar focus. By combining resources, you can extend your influence more broadly.

## 5. Realize Less Is More When Selecting Social Media Platforms

With so many social media platforms available today, you may be tempted to try using several—or all—of them to extend your association's reach. But spreading yourself too thin may backfire. The most successful marketing plans focus on a few very targeted social media outlets and use them regularly to establish a presence and engage in dialogue with people who share common interests, rather than casting too wide a net. Therefore, you need to familiarize yourself with the most popular social media options and determine which ones are truly the best fits for you. One of the main things to consider when assessing the channels that exist is what type of audience you will reach with each. You also need to consider what type of messages and information is likely to resonate with that group so that you can tailor your content to meet their needs and style preferences. In fact, many groups find that tailoring unique messages designed specifically for different channels and different audiences is most effective. Also keep in mind how people might be accessing the content, since this can also affect your presentation. For instance, if they're scrolling their news feeds by mobile devices, you'll want to keep things short and include graphics to get attention.

Your social media strategy in the 21st century needs to revolve around building quality **relationships** and attracting people who might want to get involved in your efforts.



Here is an overview of some of the popular platforms that might fit into your social media strategy:

**Facebook**—This popular social media site lends itself to personal and social interactions, and many associations tailor their posts and status updates to things that have a personal angle or that serve as a catalyst for people to engage in conversation or debate.

**Google+**—This is an alternative to Facebook that has more of a business slant, making it especially popular with technical associations and technical businesses. Google+ runs both YouTube and Gmail, offering other avenues to share valuable content. An added bonus: posting to Google+ can help increase your ranking in Google search.

**Twitter**—Use Twitter to reach a very broad audience quickly. Since Twitter is very immediate and the 140-character limit for tweets restricts what you can include, it is important for your posts to be concise while still adding real value. You can also piggy-back off timely events or news posts on Twitter to gain more traction. Some of the most successful association-run Twitter campaigns engage with leaders in the field to increase visibility and to extend their reach to a much larger audience.

**LinkedIn**—This is a great choice to reach professionals. LinkedIn content is more formal than some of the alternatives, and often also deeper as well. This channel offers valuable opportunities to connect with industry leaders and businesses and also makes it easy to network with your peer groups and target audiences. Use LinkedIn to spotlight blogs, white papers, and study findings.

**Instagram**—This platform lends itself to visuals and graphics quite well, making it a great way to showcase your brand visually. One effective way to spotlight your organization is by telling a story (think documentary style here) and using it to engage people personally.

**Quora**—Share your industry knowledge and perspective through Quora. This platform draws individuals from many technical groups and businesses to use their expertise to answer user-generated questions. This offers the opportunity to increase visibility and credibility, while also humanizing your brand. Better yet, you can follow industry insights to help guide your efforts.

## 6. Remember That Slow and Steady Wins the Race

Regardless of what platforms you use to spread your messages and establish visibility, a key part of your success will be dependent on gaining trust with your target audience. This includes reporters, bloggers, potential new members, stakeholders, community groups/organizations, and others who have an interest in the type of work you do or the standards you set. This means you aren't just looking for a quick hit but want to form deeper trust and ongoing interaction with the people on the receiving end of your communications over time. You can do this by developing high quality pieces and being consistent across multiple platforms and channels in order to build those deeper relationships.

### Less is more:

The most successful marketing plans focus on a few very targeted social media outlets and use them regularly to establish a presence and engage in dialogue with people who share common interests, rather than casting too wide a net.



You also want to avoid spreading yourself too thin by trying to post in multiple avenues without a targeted strategy. Therefore, it's worth taking the time to study some of the options that exist and figure out where your target audience spends most of their time, so that your targeted messages will reach them most effectively and efficiently.

To help you home in on which social media sites will best fit your needs, you need to truly understand whom you are trying to reach and your goals. (You can find also tools online geared to help you understand the demographics; these also offer a recommended posting frequency for best results for your target audience.)

One word of caution: while it may be tempting to buy followers and likes, there are truly no shortcuts to success with your social media efforts. It will be obvious if your followers are fake, and if they aren't engaging in conversation and sharing or reposting your content, they can actually weaken your brand reputation: it's important to avoid this pitfall.

## 7. Incorporate These Best Practices to Enhance Your Efforts

One of the best parts about using marketing and social media to strengthen your reputation and grow your membership is that you don't have to reinvent the wheel. The Internet abounds with stories of how businesses and groups are taking advantage of social media to further their goals, and you can incorporate some of their strategies to promote their organizations—and/or incorporate a good cause—into your own efforts.

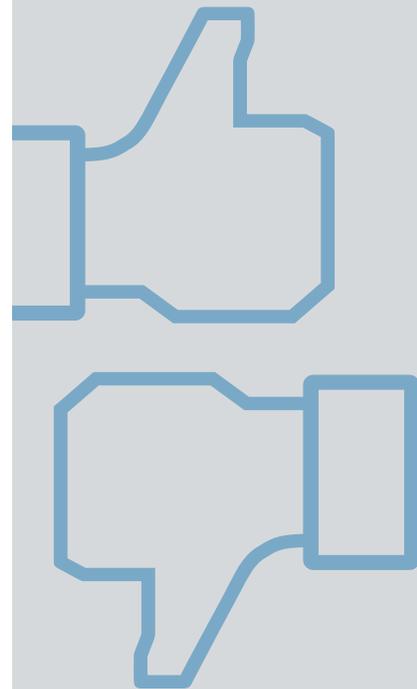
For instance, the Technology Association of Georgia wanted to create awareness about the state's strong tech capacity. Building on such a defined goal was easy via Twitter. Their efforts generated a buzz, resulting in 2,000 unique video views.

Then there's the Customer Experience Professionals Association (CXPA), which also recently turned to social media to shine the spotlight on CXDay, a global campaign to recognize customer service professionals around the country and around the world that drew impressive results. For instance, the #CXday hashtag alone drew more than 14.7 million impressions on Twitter.

An example of an even larger-scale campaign is the "Ice Bucket Challenge," which was a popular social media campaign in 2014 that set out to raise awareness about ALS (short for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) or Lou Gehrig's disease. The challenge was for people to post videos of ice water being dumped on them, along with making a donation to the ALS Association. A total of \$220 million was raised to support new research. Further, knowledge about ALS, which previously had been low, increased greatly, proving the impact social media can have when a campaign offers such an interactive component that is easy to complete and not too time-intensive. While other groups have tried similar approaches but have not had the same level of success, the concept can still be a good example that you can tailor to help engage your own audience to take action.

### One word of caution:

While it may be tempting to buy followers and likes, there are truly no shortcuts to success with your social media efforts. It will be obvious if your followers are fake, and if they aren't engaging in conversation and sharing or reposting your content, they can actually weaken your brand reputation.



What all of these examples reinforce is that you need to identify your goals and target audience and figure out how to make them work in a way that supports your broader goals and mission.

Other general lessons learned from groups and associations include working smart by reusing content you have and giving it a new spin for different channels and audiences; keeping your content consistent in regard to frequency, style, and depth, so that your relationships gain real traction over time (keeping in mind that your styles should of course vary by channel but be consistent within that scope), and learning from your competitors and adapting their approaches to fit your own unique perspective and get the most from your efforts.

## 8. Avoid These Common Mistakes

Even the best-made plans can sometimes go off track. That's why it's important to evaluate your efforts periodically and make sure they are having the impact you desire. You can also familiarize yourself with some of the common mistakes that other groups have made when they started out so you can learn from their examples. Here are some of the pitfalls that you'll want to avoid:

- > Don't spam; be sure to provide meaningful content in your posts or you'll quickly lose your followers.
- > Don't get stuck in going for numbers of people you attract. Again, it's quality that matters here and not quantity.
- > Don't start a presence on a social media platform only to disappear. You need to be consistent, and frequent, with your posts for them to have their full potential and establish your influence.

Finally, remember that Rome wasn't built in a day, and the same holds true for your social media strategy. Therefore, be patient and allow the benefits to grow a little at a time. It can take some time for the return on your investment time to be evident. Also keep in mind that your social media marketing efforts shouldn't be managed separately from the rest of your work. The most effective associations integrate social media into their day-to-day operations by using existing content, news, and resources, and finding creative ways to share them with like-minded people.

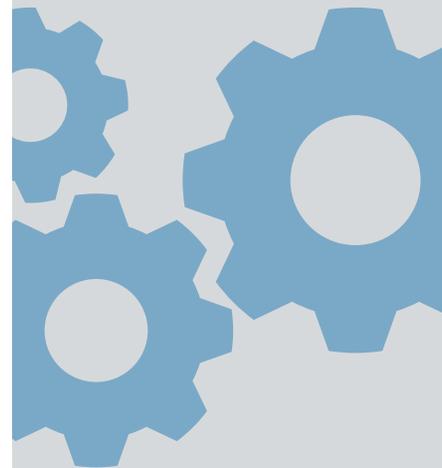
The good news is that if you have a good plan in place and the content to make it happen, your patience will pay off in the end with more effective branding, larger and more active membership, and increased interest and success.

### Tips:

Reuse content you have and give it a new spin for different channels and audiences.

Keep your content consistent in frequency, style, and depth, so that your relationships gain real traction over time.

Learn from your competitors and adapt their approaches to fit your own unique perspective.





To get the most out of your social media strategy, you can also consider working with an association management company. At Virtual, Inc., we provide strategic consulting and management services, including help with marketing and social media efforts, to associations, standard setting organizations, and technology consortia at all lifecycle stages—from start-up through growth phase and maturity. To learn more, contact our team and find out how our expertise and proven track record can enhance your social media presence and further your success.

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