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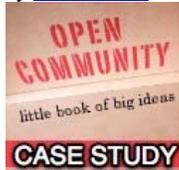SocialFish
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Open Community Case Study – Food Bank

by Deirdre Reid on February 22, 2011

We're very excited to be kicking off a regular series of Open Community case studies, in which intrepid association blogger and freelance writer Deirdre Reid will be digging into associations (and other kinds of organizations when relevant) who are living and breathing their open communities in the ways we describe in the book. If you have a case study to share, from the angle of any of the "big ideas" in our little book, please contact us.

Community: Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina

The Food Bank works with partner agencies to deliver food to low-income individuals and families in 34 counties of North Carolina, and sponsors programs that educate children and adults on how to find the food they need to become self-sufficient.

Champion: Jen Newmeyer, Database, Direct Mail & Website Manager

Big Idea: Embracing the Ecosystem

Concepts:

Healthy homebase: social features, frequent updates, interaction, openness, searchable and shareable.

Support fans evangelizing your work and create accidentally-on-purpose spokespersons.

Nurture small niche groups.

Their Story:

I first met Jen Newmeyer, who is also the Food Bank's social media person, at a Raleigh tweet-up last year. She's done a great job using social media to create a very supportive community of donors and fans, so I immediately thought of them when planning the first case study for Open Community. And do you see what I'm doing here? I'm fulfilling my role as an accidental spokesperson by giving them the spotlight and spreading their message. See, it works!

Jen keeps their homebase, their website, fresh by updating it 2-3 times a week with news about events, food drives and other activities, like their recent appearance on The Biggest Loser as part of the Pound for Pound Challenge. Site visitors can also send e-cards, request bumper stickers or create and manage their own virtual fund-raising campaigns, for example, to celebrate a birthday.

On their Facebook page and Twitter account they aim to increase awareness of what they're doing and what others are doing on their behalf. They start conversations that will get their fans talking and thinking about hunger. Their Flickr page and YouTube channel are used to support Food Bank activities, for example, displaying photos taken at community events.

Jen says, "I think our approach of focusing efforts on the two platforms with the highest engagement factor, Twitter and Facebook, has paid off. We're happy with the membership numbers and the 'chatter' that evolves from them. Interestingly, other nonprofits, including food banks, find better results using Facebook, but we've had more success, that is, one-on-one engagement, with Twitter. I discussed this with Holly Ross at NTEN and we think that's because our region is pretty plugged in with lots of active Twitter groups."

Jen and her Wilmington-based colleague, Jen Caslin, have been adopted by their local "plugged in" social media communities. Their Twitter relationships have resulted in several Raleigh-Durham and Wilmington tweet-ups hosting food drives. The most famous of all is the Deep Fried Tweet-up held at the NC State Fair. This year's Wilmington Twestival will benefit the Food Bank. A local LinkedIn networking group has even held events to benefit the Food Bank. One of their most effective unofficial outposts is the NC School of Science & Math food drive blog where they're going for the world record in March.

NC School of Science & Math food drive

Jen Caslin has had great success with the Cape Fear Tweetup group. She started talking with some folks who wanted to form a charity-based twitter group and later helped launch their first tweet-up to benefit the Food Bank in Wilmington. The group took off from there!

Their personal involvement is part of the Food Bank's recipe for success. Jen Newmeyer uses both the Food Bank and her personal Twitter accounts to not only spread the Food Bank's message but to also promote other charities and to develop relationships with local tweeps. She's become known as a champion for all worthy nonprofits. Inspired by Wendy Smith's book, Give a Little: How Your Small Donations Can Transform Our World, her family created a giving program to one charity a month.

Jen's use of social media to develop relationships has naturally led to many â€˜accidental spokespersons' or advocates, like Lisa Sullivan. Last year Lisa launched a local women's group, Tweet Divas, that's much more than a social media or networking group. She invites local charities, like the Food Bank, to come in and talk about their work. The charities leave with a carload of donations and many new fans. Lisa not only helps spread the word online and in real life about the Food Bank, last year she helped organized a social media family-friendly mixer at the Food Bank that raised awareness and funds for a summer meal program for kids. And it all started on Twitter.

Kids Summer Stock Social Media Mixer

â€œWe've noticed several niche groups that we'd like to get involved with, but don't have the resources to do so right now. However, we're launching a new program that will help fill in some of the gaps, as well as help us expand regionally.â€

This new program, Social Media Ambassadors will offer their social media supporters a way to volunteer for the Food Bank by using their blogs, Twitter or Facebook accounts to write about, post or mention the events they feel most strongly about. â€œWe'll provide a resource page with links, logos, brochures, signs and information. In exchange, we'll post and repost their efforts through our networks and feature them as official partners of the Food Bank!â€

â€œWe are proud of what we've accomplished so far using social media. I think it's made a tremendous difference in raising awareness about hunger in our communities.â€

Forward failure: We had fantastic results, lots of entries, when we placed a Facebook ad for a guitar giveaway. But when we placed an ad for our Holiday Meals campaign, we received the maximum number of hits every day for over a week, but no donations. In the future, we'll probably only use our Facebook ad budget for giveaway promotions or similar events, not fund-raising. Certainly, more testing is needed!

Proud moment: Hunger Relief Day at the State Fair in 2010 â€˜ we were trending in Raleigh all day long!

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About the Author

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Association industry blogger and freelance writer extraordinaire; find her blogging at Reid All About It, Grabbing the Gusto, SmartBlog Insights Learn More »

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Flipping your publishing model at #AMP11
I presented a session yesterday at the Association Media & Publishing Association's annual meeting on Flipping Your Publishing Model, a subject close to our hearts which Lindy wrote about last year. I was excited to showcase one association, VAR, who is doing this to great effect (explanation below), and I'm very grateful to the superstar that
Top 25 Social Media Blogs for Businesses
Sooo excited that SocialFishing made Kristi Hines' list of the Top 25 Social Media Blogs for Businesses. We're listed alongside such top-ranked mainstays as Mashable, Convince and Convert, Hubspot and Smartbrief on Social Media – these guys are used to it, of course, but for us this is always pretty big deal.
Unleash your curation creativity: 4 cool storytelling tools
I've been playing with a slew of storytelling tools lately. These are curation tools for publishing – in other words, not just curation as in filtering information for yourself, but curation in order to blog about some particular "story" or present content in a visually interesting way for other people to look at. For all

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