

Leadership 2.0

Social media in advocacy

How to leverage new technology tools to advocate for students and programs, market your schools and strengthen your communities.

Technology is always changing, always improving, and always pushing the envelope for how we work in education. Improvements in computation have provided for an explosive growth in information processing and data management. The rapid growth of the Internet has improved communication, commerce and distribution systems for entertainment sectors such as music and video.

Now we see an abundance of mobile devices that handle not only the functions of a phone, but also serve as cameras, calendars, calculators and access the Web. In this increasingly connected age, we are also seeing rapid growth in social network tools such as Twitter and Facebook. These sites are representative of Web 2.0 resources where users contribute content. Other examples of Web 2.0 sites would include social search engines such as Google and Bing, massive projects such as Wikipedia, video and photo-sharing services like YouTube and Flickr, and blogs

of many different varieties, such as Edublog or Blogger.

While many of these web 2.0 sites are well known for their entertainment value or their role in sharing information, it remains to be seen how we will truly leverage these networks to create value for society. Right now many of these resources are better known for an abundance of benign chatter about mundane topics such as what was eaten for breakfast or for sharing an opinion about the merits (or lack thereof) of a recent Justin Bieber song. However, there are emerging examples of leveraging these tools for a common purpose.

Web 2.0 tools impact a nation ... and a world

Consider, for example, the way that the Obama campaign used social media as a resource during the 2008 presidential elec-

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tion. The Obama campaign reached 5 million supporters on 15 different social networks over the course of campaign season. By November, Obama had approximately 2.5 million (some sources say as many as 3.2 million) Facebook supporters, 115,000 Twitter followers, and 50 million viewers of his YouTube channel (Aaker & Smith, 2010).

Clay Shirky, in the book “Here Comes Everybody” (2009), provides a series of samples on how Web 2.0 tools are effective to catalyze societal changes. From simple acts such as posting photos or narratives to a blog during a period of oppression, these emerging technology resources provide us with opportunities to promote change at a scale that has previously been inaccessible due to delays and challenges in connecting across the globe.

Education is inherently political

From federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind to the most mundane local board policy, elected officials are setting policy for our educational system, often with only the experience of having been a student in the education system. In the current economic climate, compensation plans such as merit pay and pension systems for public employees seem to be lightning rods for debate and controversy.

While we as educators walk a fine line when it comes to advocacy, we do not abrogate our own political rights by virtue of our positions.

Based on our experiences and expertise, we would assert that educational leaders have a duty to share their perspectives to help politicians and the community navigate through uncertain times. We are powerful, not just because of what we know as school administrators, but because of our immeasurable impact as education experts in our private, personal networks. Turning our personal networks into action networks is where the multiplier effect can strengthen our messages, while the use of technology can positively impact public education.

Advocacy begins within

So how do we best leverage these new technology tools to advocate for students and programs, as well as market our own school districts so we have more control over

A leader’s guide to navigating social media



The do’s of social media

1. Develop a clear purpose.
2. Start with small steps.
3. Connect, friend or follow experts.
4. Adjust interactive settings to your comfort level (disable comments, etc.).
5. Be genuine, authentic and conversational.

The don’ts with social media

1. Don’t abandon other forms of communication and expect social media to work for all of your stakeholders.
2. Don’t be surprised if it takes a while to build your network. Your virtual network will likely resemble your actual human network in the early stages.
3. Don’t use your professional presence for political advocacy. Just as district leaders often use a separate cell phone during bond campaigns so that there is no appearance of using district resources for political purposes, separate your personal advocacy from your professional outreach.
4. Don’t go “all in” with a single medium – vendors and platforms change. Just like with your investments, diversify your efforts and leverage tools that can cross-post to simplify your efforts.
5. Don’t post anything with the idea that you can “delete” it later. Everything on the Web can be shared and archived, which means you are leaving a permanent footprint with each post. If in doubt, consult with colleagues before publishing. The effort and judicious approach at the front end will simplify potential complications later.

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the information going out? Movements are enhanced when there is:

- a clear purpose;
- the use of the proper tool for that outcome; and
- activity monitoring in a way that aligns with the spirit of the endeavor.

Take the Vacaville School District, for example. Under the leadership of Superintendent John Aycock, district staff and parent volunteers used social media to build an advocacy campaign to “Save Our Students.” The “SOS” campaign was a creation that came about during rather heated high-profile discussions concerning school closures in the district.

Over the years, Aycock cultivated a close relationship with the leaders of the district’s parent groups. He called several special meetings with all the leaders of the parent groups at each school site for a specific purpose: to re-channel the anger from the thoughts of

school closures and redirect that energy into some positive pursuit. As discussions unfolded with parents, it became apparent the district was under-utilizing social media.

Aycock reported, “Our younger parents were very knowledgeable in the use of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, texting and blogging. The social media outlets became the foundation for our outreach to raise funds for our schools. After a short, intensive multi-media campaign, we raised thousands of dollars and have thousands of contacts that we continue to use for our outreach and support for our schools.”

So you see, it can be done. Grassroots activism is at the heart of what we do in ACSA to share our message, and there are many tools and approaches from which to drive this work. Activism is an inherently social practice. Movements, campaigns and issue advocacy can’t succeed without the foundation of solid communication and effective

collaboration among team members.

Take parcel taxes in school districts. The successful ones are those where classified, certificated and administrative staff have worked with parents and business leaders to move the campaign with a common, clear message. Working together isn't just enjoyable – it's critical. Only when we mobilize our collective power and talents can we move forward our goals of social and political change.

The role of Facebook

Facebook is one tool that, due to its free nature and expanse of 600 million users, is too good to pass up. Add to that the ability people have to opt in to a campaign or school/district page and the 24/7 news feed and Facebook sounds better and better.

Caution! Facebook isn't a silver bullet.

Those 600 million people can provide a lot of content, which fills news feeds and status updates with a lot of stuff. And there are other groups to compete with – lots of them! Unfortunately, because anyone can “opt in” it also may be that you have followers or “like” members who are checking out the conversation but really may not be supporters. Group size does not indicate general interest. Don't forget that not everyone has a Facebook account, so you'll need to rely on other communication tools as well.

To start with, we recommend the creation of a district Facebook page where highlights of district work, students and staff successes, and initiatives can be shared on a regular basis. Having followers who are regularly aware of your successes and are connected with your message help you better position the district when its time for a bond measure or parcel tax.

Be clear about your goals – communicate to others the current fiscal situation and successes of programs that might be reduced or eliminated. Get people involved, which means sharing the site with constituent groups, elected officials, community leaders and others who need to know about your work. After all, you can have a great message but if you are talking to a few friends in a closet, why bother?

The San Diego Unified School District has a robust following on Facebook. Its base

of nearly 1,500 users post messages, share photos, and read the latest successes of the district. From Teacher of the Year celebrations to students earning awards and college scholarships, the message shared on the SDUSD page is that programs are strong, students are achieving, and communication is transparent.

TICAL, the Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership, also effectively uses Facebook. Jason Borgen, manager of the site, said that “using Facebook as a school communication tool allows



educators to merge one's personal and professional life in a unique and indirect way.”

He regularly updates the TICAL page with significant and timely resources for school leaders. Many of these resources also come from the TICAL website, but because educational leaders are very busy, they may forget to check the site or even read the TICAL eBlast. Why not embed significant events, resources, and research within their personal social network? This is a great strategy that works to reach more users and can be shared by users across the Facebook platform.

Twitterific

Twitter is a microblog, a forum for small messages of up to 140 characters. Originally designed to answer the question, “What are you doing?” it was created for people to keep in touch with friends. Although growth has slowed lately, it was gaining users at astonishing rates – as high as 1,392 percent during 2009. The ability for the posts to be received as text alerts is one of the reasons for the rapid growth. It is no coincidence that the use of Twitter has increased in tandem with

the rise in mobile devices and the increased use of text messaging as a communication medium.

One of the unique approaches for Twitter is to deliver messages that the mainstream media might not pick up, such as grassroots fundraising campaigns, moves to add more crosswalks to certain school neighborhoods, and more. News travels fast within the Twitter community and provides a sense of immediacy not found in other modes of communication. Models include the American Red Cross (@redcross) and the Humane Society (@humanesociety).

The challenge with Twitter is that if you have many followers and they follow many others, it can be hard to find the messages you might be sending out unless they go directly to your feed. Furthermore, the short nature means that being concise is a necessity, and sometimes telling our story in education isn't possible with a message length of 140 characters. Many Twitter users have found success by posting links to websites, blogs, videos and photos when a short text message is not sufficient.

Twitter's strength lies in its numbers and ability to have a community feel. One strategy is to make your tweets (your messages) conversational, often asking questions or giving data on what program impacts could be. Use your personality! Even though this is a social media tool and you may be doing it for a school or district campaign, maintain a conversational, fun, down-to-earth approach. Connect with other people or organizations that are like-minded and “follow them.” The more you follow others, the more followers you will have who can often “retweet” your messages for broader message distribution.

eBlasts

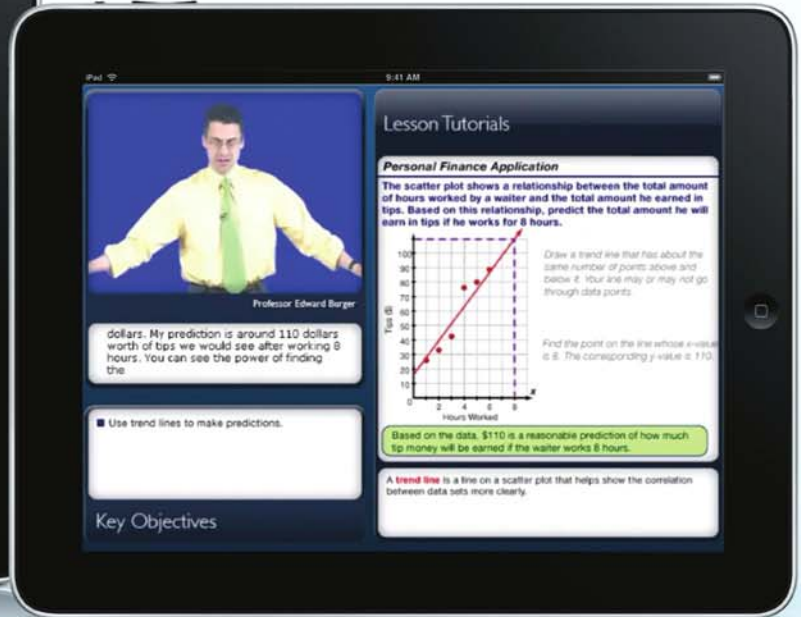
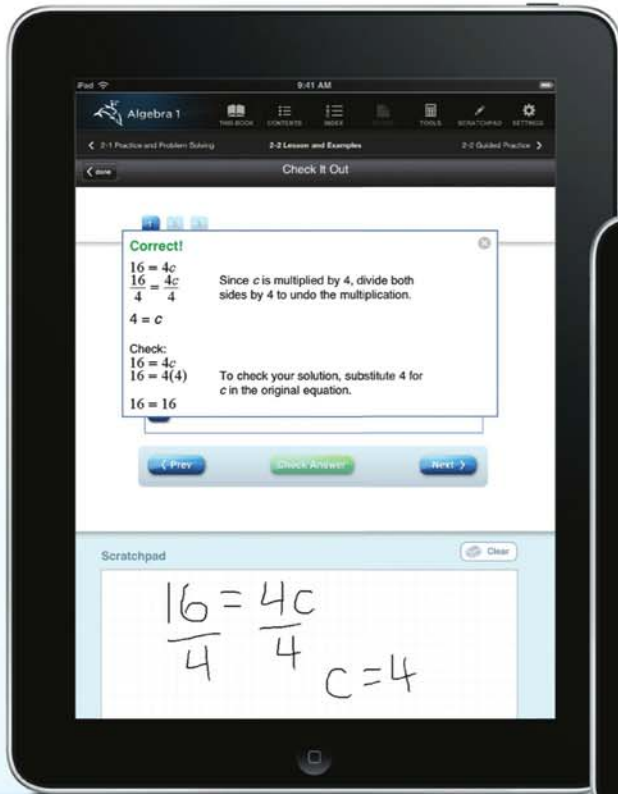
With advocacy efforts, the aim is to create change or engage action. A full media strategy for getting out a message from your district or school cannot ignore the impact of e-mails or electronic newsletters, affectionately known as “eBlasts.” eBlasts are an efficient way to share information with the masses. Possible uses of e-mail for advocacy can include:

Continued on page 22



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- sending action alerts to key constituents;
- sharing plans for a messaging campaign; and
- contacting lawmakers and their staff.

Many firms specialize in eBlast services for nominal fees ranging from \$20-40 per month and most are intuitive and fairly easy to use. Templates allow you to paste in content and send quickly with little fanfare. Even better, with the settings arranged in a certain way, you also avoid all of the bounce-back messages and “out of office” auto-replies when your e-mails go out. Even better, recipients can opt in or out in an automated manner, so the upkeep on the system doesn’t bog you down with additional work.

Some of the top industry eBlast companies include Constant Contact, My Emma, and Vertical Response, which does offer free accounts to non-profits, including schools/districts that use their federal identification number when setting up the account.

Alyssa Lynch, career technical education coordinator for the Santa Clara County Of-

fice of Education, manages a monthly, state-wide eBlast. “The use of e-mail newsletters allows me to communicate with school districts, colleagues in CTE, business leaders, and members of the greater community on issues related to CTE,” she said. “When we need action on legislative policy, it’s the most

One superintendent said he often reads other county office eBlasts to gives him a sense of what’s going on around the state.

precise, timely and efficient way to communicate a message.”

Michael Watkins, superintendent of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, frequently uses eBlasts. He said, “What better way to highlight what we do than to send out snippets of immediate, significant news and events that link them back to the website. I regularly read other county office eBlasts. This gives me a sense of what’s happening

around the state and affords us the opportunity to learn and build with other institutions without distance causing any constraints.”

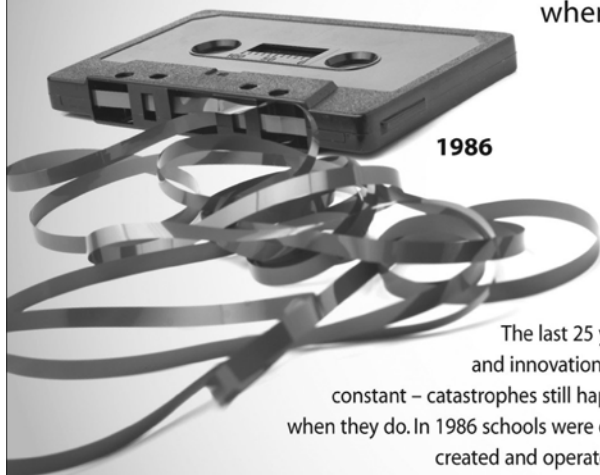
Life in the blogosphere

Blogs are abundant and pervasive in today’s web 2.0 world. The name, derived from “weblog,” is a combination of the medium and the intent. Originally, blogs were used to provide diary-like journal entries that were date- and time-stamped as a way to archive past posts. Now blogs are used for just about everything – from news services to cooking recipes. The ease in setting up and posting has led to meteoric usage rates. As of today, Wordpress had published 21 million blogs (Wordpress, 2011). The ability for viewers to comment also creates an opportunity for interaction and community development.

There is even an entire blogging community devoted to educators: <http://edublogs.org> is a host for students, teachers and institutions. School districts such as Mt. Diablo (<http://mdusd.blogspot.com>) and Carlsbad **Continued on page 38**

Some things stay the same.

Like SELF’s proven ability to protect schools when catastrophe strikes



1986



2011

The last 25 years have been filled with changes and innovation. Some things, however, have remained constant – catastrophes still happen and schools still find themselves at risk financially when they do. In 1986 schools were either unable to afford or to buy liability insurance and SELF, created and operated by schools, was the answer to that crisis.

Today, having paid more than \$240 million in member losses, SELF is still helping schools through each new challenge. As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we’d like to reflect on what we, California’s schools, have created. We took a crisis and made it an opportunity for innovation.

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Continued from page 22

Unified (<http://carlsbadunified.blogspot.com>) are using blogs to increase outreach and share information with their communities.

One of the reasons for the popularity in blogging is not only the ease in publishing, but the fact that they are powered with RSS

(Real Simple Syndication) that enables the posts to be pushed and pulled into various settings. Users can “subscribe” to those posts and use a resource such as Google Reader or Flipboard to have new information pushed to the user, instead of the more traditional approach of “surfing,” where the user goes to various websites to obtain information. Check the TICAL website for a quick tutorial on how RSS works if you want to learn more

about this powerful feature (http://portical.org/Presentations/quick_takes/#rss).

So now what?

Our school systems face daunting challenges, particularly now with such uncertain budgets. Our challenges include closing performance gaps, increasing graduation rates, and increases in class size. While there are growing examples of successes we can celebrate, there aren't enough of us telling the story to our constituents and to the policy-makers who most need to understand the impact of the decisions they make and the successes that can result.

Using social media provides school leaders with an opportunity to connect directly with others instead of relying on traditional media outlets to carry the news. Additionally, social media provides opportunities to increase connectedness and build relationships that enhance social capital and strengthen communities.

While learning how to use these social media tools may seem a daunting challenge, if we truly want to lead our students into the future we need to take the leap and engage. We must do this if we are to remain relevant and connected. For the sake of our schools and districts, let's get moving. ■

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	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
1		L								?
2	M	I	N	E	F	I	E	L	D	
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7		I		T		4		M		6
8		T		S						
9		Y				C	A	S	p	s

2a	across	What you are in
2i	down	California School Construction Certification Agency
6f	down	California Access Compliance Administrative Title
7j	-	Final form required by Division of State Architect
4g	across	Federal Disabled Access Legislation
1b	down	What you have
5j	-	Discern its Value and Opportunity Cost
4h	down	WE CAN HELP YOU
1j	-	AS YOUR TRUSTED ADVISORS, WE EMPLOY:
2d	down	Those who champion preemptive Risk Mitigation
4b	across	Best Management Practices
9f	across	State of California Certified Access Specialists

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