

# Using Social Networking Tools to Mobilize Your Membership

**Rose Vines**  
**Death Penalty Discourse Network**

**Email:** [rosevines@dpcourse.org](mailto:rosevines@dpcourse.org)  
**Blog:** [www.rosevines.org](http://www.rosevines.org)  
**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/rosevines](http://www.twitter.com/rosevines)

*We have a problem. There are many, many causes vying for people's time and money and attention. It just so happens that our cause is a hard sell.*

*To overcome that and to get our voice heard and to mobilize others to action, we need to find a way to cut through the babble and connect with people.*

*That's the challenge we face.*

*One way to cut through the babble is to adopt an INFORMED, CONSCIOUS, COMMITTED approach to using social networking tools, which are all about connecting.*

## **INFORMED**

### **Understand what you're getting yourself into.**

- Recognize that in Web 2.0, people *and* services socialize.
- You're building a community of people.
- You're building that community on a foundation of services that speak to one another.
  - Repetition, echoing and sharing are integral to social networking.
  - Share icons and badges are indicators of links between services.
  - Social networking services automatically interact with one another.
    - For example, Friendfeed can pull in info from around 60 services and funnel them into a single stream of information.

### **Choose your tools to take advantage of the feedback effects**

- Use tools that talk to one another
  - Use Twitter plus a Twitter widget on your blog.
  - Put your photos on Flickr, echo them in Facebook, link to them via tweets in Twitter
  - Announce your 12seconds.tv episodes on Twitter.
  - Add an RSS news feed for your web site.
    - For example, grab news from Death Penalty Information Center's RSS feed and feature it on your front page.

### **Be prepared to release your grip on your message**

- Social networking amplifies your message and puts it into the hands of many people.
- The flip side of that is you can't necessarily control what all those people say and how they convey your message to others.
- The larger your network, the less control you have over the content.

- This isn't, necessarily, a bad thing. It's an opportunity as well as a hazard and it certainly diversifies the voices uttering your message.
- In social networking, content is built by you *and* your members.
  - Comments on blogs and YouTube
  - Facebook posts
  - Twitter exchanges
  - Ning discussion boards

## **CONSCIOUS**

**Use online tools only if they will help you in your goals.**

- Clarify your goals first:
  - What do you hope to achieve using online tools?
  - Who is your intended audience?
  - Are you sure your existing tools and expertise won't get the job done just as easily?
- Assess your resources
  - Do you have enough time and money?
  - Do you have the knowledge?
  - Do you have the enthusiasm and commitment from others in your organization?

**Choose a set of tools that will help you reach your goals**

- Provide a home base for your community.
  - A Facebook page
  - Ning community
  - YouTube site
  - Custom-built web site
- Use a blog to keep things fresh and help educate members.
  - WordPress
  - Blogger
  - Squarespace
- Tie in other resources to enrich the experience
  - YouTube
    - Put it on YouTube not because that's the center of your action, but because it's free and you can then embed the video code in your "real" site.
  - 12seconds.tv
  - Flickr
  - Picasa Web Albums
  - Sprout Builder
- Tie it all together with messaging.
  - Twitter, SMS, email alerts
  - Messaging services thread the other services together and provide an alert system.

## **COMMITTED**

### **Dedicate yourself to your chosen services.**

- Integrate your services so they feed upon one another
  - Tweet about blogging. Blog about tweeting. Put your blog on your web site.
  - Automatically echo your tweets into your blog: instant content.
  - Funnel supporters from multiple sites and from the real world.
  - Publicize your online activities in the real world: leaflets, business cards, slideshows at talks.

### **Socialize like you mean it**

- Activity breeds activity.
  - Don't abandon your supporters.
  - Blog regularly.
  - Tweet with value.
- Thoughtful activity breeds loyalty.
  - If you build it, they will not come. If you live in it, they will come.
  - Let your supporters know you give a damn.
  - Provide value in all you display, blog, tweet.
  - Invite comments on your blog. Respond to them.
  - Interaction opens up new opportunities and ideas.

### **Reward your top supporters**

- They will become ambassadors for your cause
  - They'll deliver your message to people you otherwise would not reach.
  - They'll do your work for you.
- We're in the business of changing hearts and minds. It's a personal thing.
- You'll learn from them. (They may understand social networking better than you do, too.)
- Others will be jealous.
  - By rewarding your key supporters, you'll incite others to activity.
- Foster participation:
  - Hold competitions for t-shirt design or campaign slogans.
  - Encourage blog comments.
  - Invite newsletter contributions, photos, video clips, reports from prison visits.
- Possible rewards:
  - Spotlight thoughtful comments made on your blog.
  - "Abolitionist of the month" profiles.
  - T-shirts or free newsletter subscription.

## Resources

### **12seconds.tv**

Create 12-second videos

[www.12seconds.tv](http://www.12seconds.tv)

### **Beth Kanter's Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media**

One of the most knowledgeable social networkers around.

<http://beth.typepad.com/>

### **Blogger**

Google's free blogging service.

[www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)

### **Death Penalty Information Center RSS news feed**

[www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/rss.xml](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/rss.xml)

### **Epic Change**

An organization that excels at using social networking in a meaningful and committed fashion

[www.epicchange.org](http://www.epicchange.org)

### **Facebook Causes**

Facebook's rather confusing community and fundraising tools.

<http://apps.facebook.com/causes>

### **Flickr**

Photo site that plays extremely well with many other services

[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

### **Friendfeed**

Pools information from dozens of social networking services

[www.friendfeed.com](http://www.friendfeed.com)

### **Google for Non-Profits**

Google provides grants, free organizational email and other services

[www.google.com/nonprofits](http://www.google.com/nonprofits)

### **Ning**

Create your own social network.

[www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com)

### **Sister Helen on Twitter**

[www.twitter.com/helenprejean](http://www.twitter.com/helenprejean)

### **Sister Helen's blog**

[www.sisterhelen.org](http://www.sisterhelen.org)

### **Nonprofit Web Design blog**

[www.kingjason.co.uk/index.php](http://www.kingjason.co.uk/index.php)

### **Progressive Exchange**

[www.progressiveexchange.org](http://www.progressiveexchange.org)

### **Sprout Builder**

Create media, RSS, info widgets that your members can "plant" on their own sites, with automatically broadcast content updates.

[www.sproutbuilder.com](http://www.sproutbuilder.com)

### **Squarespace**

Squarespace (a paid service) lets you build blog-centric web sites easily and with a lot of flexibility.

[www.squarespace.com](http://www.squarespace.com)

### **The Promise Tree**

A great example of creating a petition site that involves more than just signing.

[www.savetheredgums.com.au](http://www.savetheredgums.com.au)

**Tweetdeck**

Provides a way to organize and monitor your Twitter stream

[www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com)

**Twitter**

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

**Wordpress**

Wordpress offers both hosted and non-hosted (place on your own domain) free blogs, which are highly customizable with widgets and themes.

[www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)

[www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org)

**YouTube Non-Profit Program**

[www.youtube.com/nonprofits](http://www.youtube.com/nonprofits)

**Students Against the Death Penalty**

[www.studentabolition.org](http://www.studentabolition.org)

[www.youtube.com/user/stopexecutions](http://www.youtube.com/user/stopexecutions)

## Glossary

**blog** Short for web log. An online journal. Most blogs provide a way for readers of the blog to respond to the blogger.

**cloud computing** Internet-based computing: online applications plus online data storage. Some examples are Gmail ([www.gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com)), Adobe's online word processor, Buzzword ([www.buzzword.com](http://www.buzzword.com)) and its photo editor, Photoshop Express ([www.photoshop.com](http://www.photoshop.com)). In cloud computing, the browser is the one key application. Through it, we interact with more powerful applications – office suites, accounting programs, video and photo editing apps, games – residing on remote, Internet-connected servers. In similar fashion, our data moves online, too, no longer sitting on a hard drive in our PC.

**feed** Updated web content delivered automatically to subscribers. Most blogs, for example, display a subscribe button that looks like this:



Clicking that button lets you become a subscriber to the blog's news feed, and have updates delivered automatically to your chosen feed reader. The feed reader could be your browser (where the feed appears in your bookmarks), a dedicated online newsreader such as Google's Reader ([www.google.com/reader](http://www.google.com/reader)), a downloadable newsreading program, such as FeedDemon ([www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon](http://www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon)), or a newsreader on your mobile phone, such as NetNewsWire for the iPhone.

**post** Any contribution to a blog, discussion board, online forum. A post could be a new blog update, a comment on a blog, a photo uploaded to a Flickr account. It's used both as a noun and as a verb.

**RSS** Really Simple Syndication. A format used for delivering *feeds*. The two most popular feed formats are RSS and Atom. Usually, you don't need to know about a feed's format, as this is handled automatically by your browser or newsreader.

**SMS** Short Message Service. A means of exchanging text messages on mobile phones. While "text" is more frequently used in the USA, SMS is often used overseas: "I'll text you about that", "I'll SMS you about that".

**social networking service** An online service designed to build communities of people linked by some common factor. Social networks provide an array of tools – instant messaging, discussion boards, email and so on – which allow members to communicate with one another.

**Twitter** A micro-blogging service, which limits your updates, known as "tweets", to 140 characters. While it's possible to see everyone's updates (from all four or five million members), most people choose to "follow" certain others and view these selected "tweetstreams".

**Web 2.0** The second generation of the World Wide Web in which content is developed through user participation, and web-based services and applications interact with other such services to provide powerful, flexible resources. In the early days, the Web (Web 1.0) was nothing more than a one-way publishing medium and the browser simply a tool for viewing the published content. In Web 2.0, the Web *is* the computer, capable of running applications and storing and manipulating data. Social networking, cloud computing and a more stylish approach to site design are all aspects of Web 2.0.

**widget** A mini application that can be copied and embedded in any web page. Some examples are a box that displays a person's *tweetstream* on their blog; a file "drop box" for downloading or uploading files on a web site or MySpace page (see [www.box.net/widget](http://www.box.net/widget) for an example); or one of Sprout Builder's ([www.sproutbuilder.com](http://www.sproutbuilder.com)) multimedia-driven "sprouts", which lets you display and share content including videos, photos, music and RSS feeds.

**wiki** From the Hawaiian "wiki wiki" which means "quick". A wiki is a collaborative web site or blog. The most famous wiki of them all is Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)), a global, reader-generated encyclopedia.