

Why Are Online and Mobile Channels So Important to Nonprofits Today?

When it comes to using social and mobile technology, size does not matter. Your organization might be a large foundation, association, or advocacy group. It might be a five-person think-tank. Or maybe it's an all-volunteer, neighborhood group. Regardless, you need to build strong relationships with your constituents, and you need to reach them wherever they are and at a moment's notice. To truly cultivate these relationships and to mobilize your base, you will need to expand your outreach to include multiple online channels and tools such as social media, email, and mobile. All of these platforms are experiencing explosive growth and will continue to gain momentum. No organization can continue to thrive unless they use these channels strategically.

Today, more people are online than ever before. And that number is increasing every single day. In the United States, 78% of the population (or more than 245 million people) use the Internet, according to ITU, the United Nations agency for information and communications.⁵

Quantcast, one of the biggest analytics companies measuring websites and social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, shows that social networks dominate the top five websites ranked by U.S. traffic. And there are 5.2 billion mobile accounts, meaning there are now almost five times as many mobile phone subscriptions as there are personal computers or landline phones.⁶

It's no coincidence that both prominent organizations such as the Humane Society of the United States and small grassroots groups such as Epic Change, a volunteer-led organization that raises funds to support localized projects such as building

classrooms in Tanzania, have experienced significant growth and success using online and mobile channels. One secret to their success is that they recognized early the enormous growth of online channels, and they utilized these channels in tandem. Instead of solely focusing their energy on one offline channel, such as direct mail, to connect to new supporters and generate action, these organizations also leveraged online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and blogging platforms such as Tumblr, and they fully embraced email and mobile communications. They found ways to coordinate and integrate all of these channels effectively into their advocacy, communications and outreach, and fundraising campaigns.

THE GROWTH OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Americans spend about 25% of their time online on social networks, according to the Nielsen report “State of the Media: The Social Media Report.”⁷ They spend a roughly equal amount of their time reading blogs, of which there are more than 156 million.⁸ Facebook and other social networks are so popular that Americans are spending even more time on them than Google.

The infographics that follow, Figures 1.1 and 1.2, show a snapshot of year-to-year growth in social media use from 2011 to 2012. Keep in mind that although the online multichannel landscape will continue to evolve, these channels are here to stay and will be effective organizing and fundraising tools, as well as complementary to your offline engagement, into the future.

WHO IS USING MOBILE?

We live in a mobile-dependent world: 83% of U.S. adults own mobile phones and three-quarters of these adults send and receive text messages on their phones, according to the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project.⁹

Mobile usage has grown so much over the last five years that it’s now one of the main channels that people use to communicate with their friends, colleagues, businesses, and favorite organizations. People are also using mobile devices to make purchases, donate money to their favorite organizations, play video games, post updates to social networks, upload and share photos, record and post videos, track and share their location, take online actions such as signing petitions, and so on. In 2011, 20% of all emails opened were accessed via a mobile device, according to a report by Knotice.¹⁰ And only 3% of emails opened on a mobile device were later opened on a desktop computer, thus suggesting people’s

Figure 1.1
Year-to-Year Growth in Social Media Use from 2011 to 2012

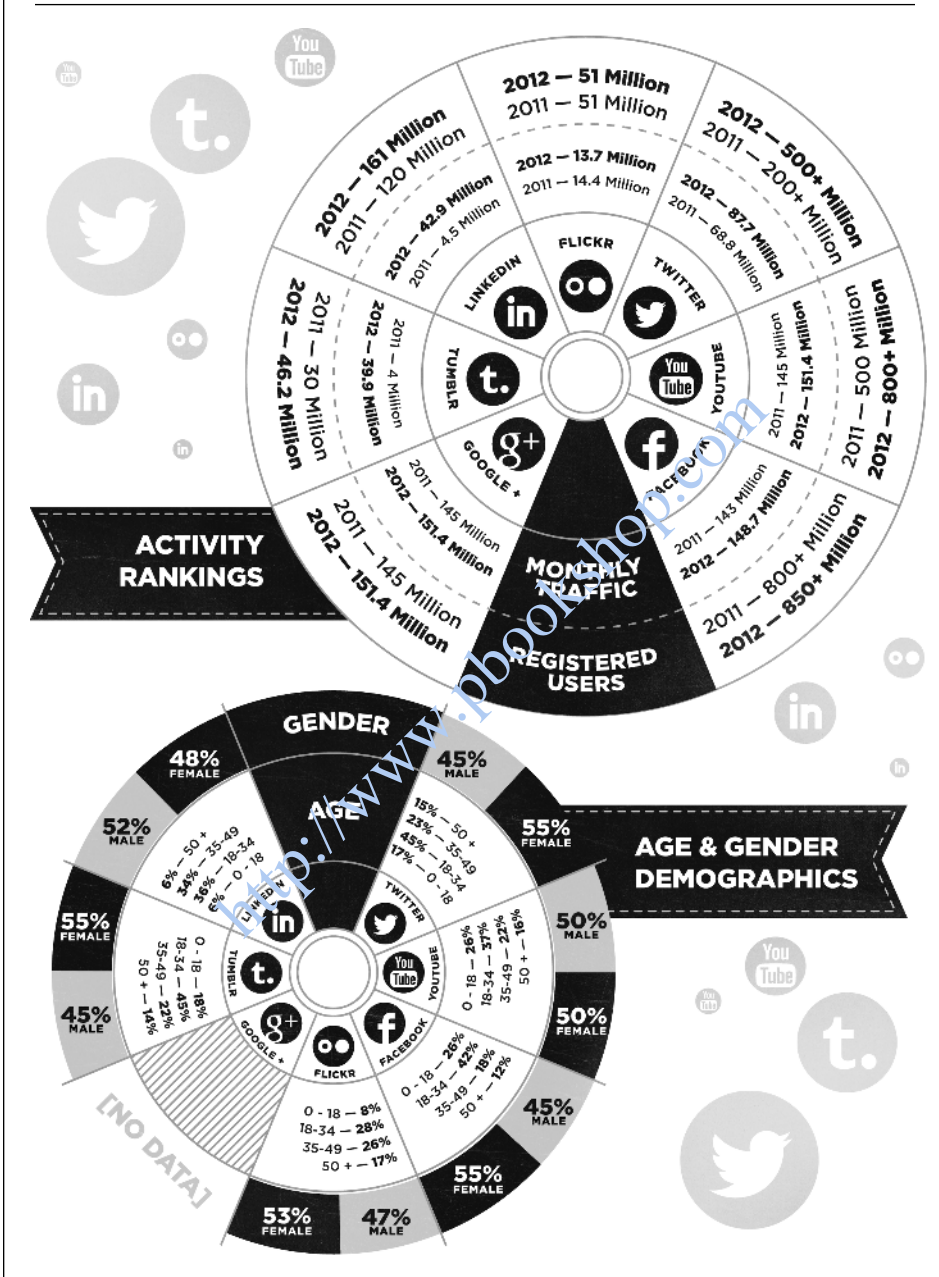


Figure 1.2
 2012 Social Media Statistics Racial Demographics
 and U.S. Traffic Rankings

2012

SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS

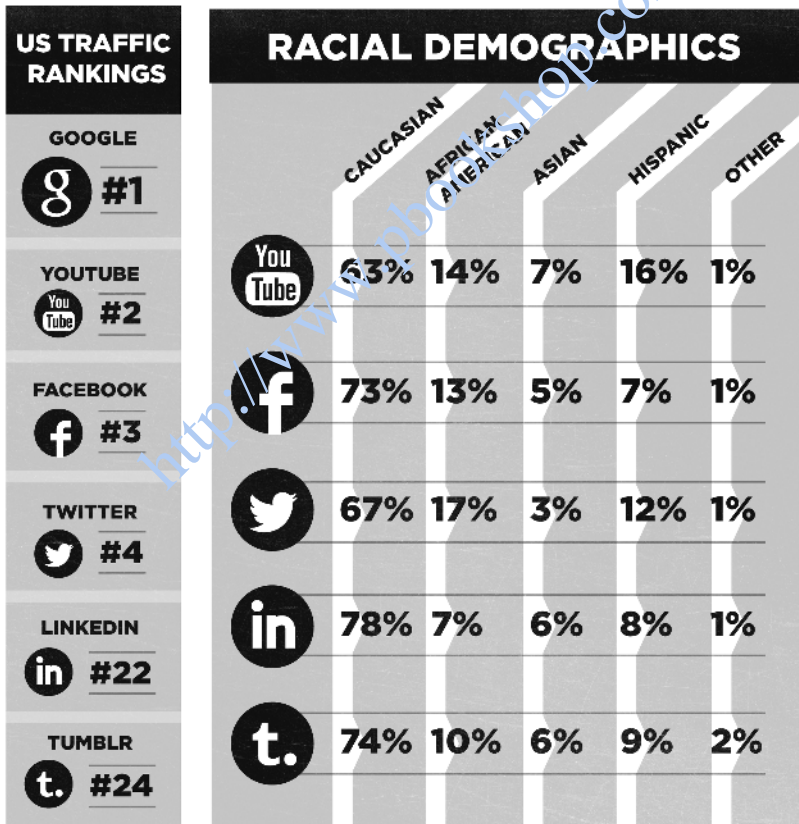
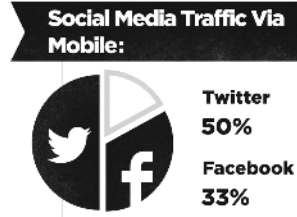
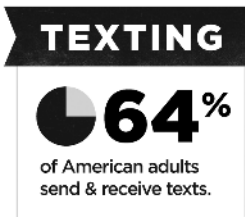
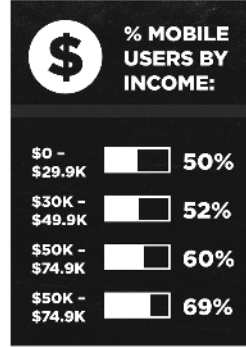
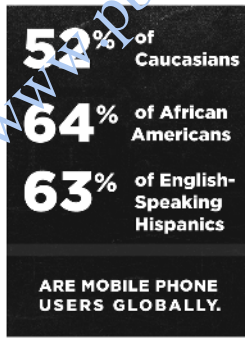
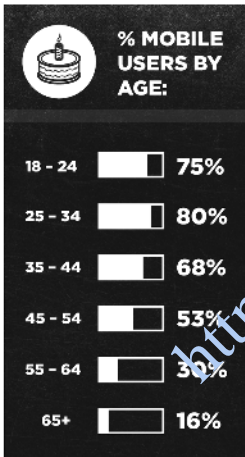


Figure 1.3
2012 Mobile Use Statistics

2012 MOBILE USE STATISTICS

THERE ARE
5.2 BILLION
MOBILE ACCOUNTS
WORLDWIDE



growing comfort level with mobile communication as an effective substitute for computer-based communications. Nonprofits can no longer afford *not* to have a mobile strategy. Check out the data in Figure 1.3 and you'll see why.

DON'T FORGET: OFFLINE COUNTS BIG TIME TOO!

A survey by Georgetown University's Center for Social Impact Communication and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide found that Generations Y and X think social networking sites such as Facebook "help increase visibility for causes and help them get the word out about causes more easily." The same study found that Generations X and Y also are "significantly more likely to report that they would support a cause online rather than offline."

Likewise, the same study found that 62% of Americans—nearly two-thirds of them—reported that being told *in person* is the way that they are typically informed of causes and social issues in which others want them to be involved.

The myriad technologies that we have now and that are emerging every day will never replace the work that organizations do face-to-face, on the ground. True multichannel strategies integrate online and offline opportunities to build community, raise financial support, and create real change. The following chapters are designed to highlight opportunities and showcase examples of successful multichannel strategies that leverage online and mobile strategies while continuing to build on offline action.

So let's begin!