How to promote your cause on Twitter and Facebook (without being annoying)

April 2 2009, By Bridget Carey

A reader recently posed this question: I'm training for the NYC Triathlon with a group that raises money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. What is the etiquette on soliciting people through Twitter or even Facebook to get donations? Is there a way, without breaking any major etiquette rules or harassing people, to help with my fundraising?

We like that you're asking, because we often come across people who are shameless marketers/self-promoters.

On Facebook, we suggest using the Causes application, which allows fundraising for any registered 501c(3) nonprofits. Send out ONE initial invitation to your Facebook network. For the friends who accept, we wouldn't send more than one message a week; less is better. It's OK the day before the event though, to ramp it up.

On Twitter, we would send out occasional tweets, or posts, to followers about how your training is going. Every now and then, include a link back to a site where they can donate. How often should you send out messages? That's up to you, but don't drown people with donation guilt.

We would suggest spreading it out, a few times a week, at different times. Business hours have the highest traffic. Also, don't forget to send private direct messages to thank those who do donate.

But you can also reach out to new people. Use sites like

search.twitter.com to find people near to you who might share an interest in your event. For example: search "marathon" and "Miami." Another site we use is twitter.grader.com/ .

If you want to go farther and promote an event, here's how we would do it: First, create a separate account apart from your personal account. That way, it's a clear line of communication between people who want to follow the event versus people who are following you.

By all means, you can and should cross-promote from your personal account about the event. But having one name that's strictly about your philanthropic efforts makes the branding crystal-clear.

After setting up the charity account, make several tweets about the event before you start marketing the account. Make sure its profile is filled out, including a logo.

Then you're ready to let your personal followers in on the other account. (This assumes you already have a personal account with a following. To grow our followers, we try to send out tweets that are funny, interesting, or otherwise add value. In short, good water-cooler conversation that's 140 characters or fewer.)

For inspiration, check out Twestival.com. Organizers say the event raised more than $250,000 last month to help provide clean water to developing countries_marketed globally via Twitter.

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