Models for Change - Using Social Media to Tell Our Stories

As we continue to share the successes, stories and lessons we have learned together in the *Models for Change Initiative*, we need to take advantage of social media as a powerful tool.

Word of mouth works, but your word online travels further and reaches more potential allies and partners. With the onslaught of social media platforms like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Digg… practitioners, advocates, researchers and nonprofits have a better chance to reach their peers and others interested in creating change in juvenile justice systems.

These social networks can aid in nonprofits' dissemination strategies, advocacy campaigns and information sharing. These platforms - when used correctly - can be surefire ways to gauge influence and build a community of supporters and partners that can share and strengthen your message.

The Big Two: Twitter and Facebook

Twitter is an open chat room, but you can only chat for 140 characters or less. **Facebook** is a website where users can create a profile, upload news, photos and video, and choose to interact with users.

Each can be geared for personal use, but in today's climate of information sharing, branding and messaging, organizations, corporations and celebrities are successfully using these two platforms to create buy-in, gain clientele and push messaging.

Join the conversation!

Set up a Facebook page for your organization at Facebook.com. Fill in the profile and biography   so that other people can know more about your work. Use your logo as the profile picture. Fill the page with content (photos from events, comments, research, upcoming conferences and news articles relating to your area of concern before releasing it the public; they want to see that your organization is busy, thriving and interesting.

Set up a Twitter account for your organization at Twitter.com and create a handle (i.e. @justicepolicy, @southerncenter, etc.). Fill in the profile and biography and use your logo as the profile picture. Avoid using punctuation in your username.

Spread the word!

Email your listserv and encourage them to check out your new platforms. Follow and like partner organizations so they connect to your accounts. Stay active and regularly post content.; your subscribers will come to rely on you for information, share your messages with others and increase your following!

Now that you know what's out there, here's a cheat sheet to help you get started!

Twitter definitions:

Tweet: A short update of what you are doing for about 140 characters. You can update followers on new research, news stories, or an image worth sharing throughout the day. Experts, however, suggest limiting your Tweets to 5 per day, and no more than 6! Don't share information you may regret making public.

Followers: People/organizations/companies subscribed to receive your Tweets. Social networking is all about your supporters and their messaging and Twitter is about conversation. You can't have a conversation on Twitter if you are not following your followers. Listen to what your Twitter friends are saying.

Direct Message (DM): A private message sent or received to/from a follower similar to email, but still 140 characters or less. Don't send an update when a direct message is more appropriate — for example, when the update is meaningless to anyone except one person. Your followers will appreciate not being spammed with excess content.

At Mentions (@): The @ symbol is used when you are referring to a Twitterer in your own updates. You can prefix their username with @ to display his/her Twitter account in the update. (*ex. Models for Change conference speaker @johnwilliams gave a riveting speech.*) It will appear on both your feed and their feed for all to see. Respond to Twitter friends when you can add value to the conversation. Mentioning other organizations is both good manners and good strategy. They will appreciate the recognition and will respond in kind.

Re-Tweet (RT): You can make another Twitterer's tweet go viral by reposting or relaying a tweet or update. The more you ReTweet (RT) others, the more they will RT your Tweets in return.

Hashtag (#): When you want to tell something specific about some issue or subject, you can prefix your subject with #. The more people that re-tweet your message and/or use the same # with their own tweets, the # or subject acts like a keyword and becomes searchable and more popular. (*Ex. Conference speaker @johnwilliams gave a riveting speech during annual #modelsforchange conference*)

The official hashtag for Models for Change is #modelsforchange.

Trending: Trending occurs when a # becomes a top, searchable category that other people are following, Tweeting about.

Facebook definitions:

Status Update: An announcement about an accolade, current event, news story, photo, etc. You have as much space to type as you'd like but keep it short to increase the likelihood that people will read it.

Wall: The main page where a user posts photos, news, announcements that all users are directed to.

Like: To allow users know that you "like" or support a particular posting on a user's wall.

News feed: The listing of all Facebook friends' status updates, photo posts and announcements.

To beef up your social media skills, contact the Justice Policy Institute by logging on to www.justicepolicy.org or call 202.558.7974.

Sources: Hellbound Bloggers, Network for Good, PC World