

What is it?

A social network service uses software to build online social networks for communities of people who share interests and activities or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.

Most services are primarily web-based and provide a collection of various ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, discussion groups, and so on. Social networking has revolutionized the way we communicate and share information with one another in today's society. Various social networking websites are being used by millions of people everyday on a regular basis and it now seems that social networking is a part of everyday life. Popular social networking sites include MySpace (www.myspace.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com).

More info:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking

Why use it?

While many people regard social networking tools as a fun diversion, some nonprofits are leveraging them to accomplish serious goals, such as increasing their visibility, helping constituents find jobs, and raising awareness about time-sensitive issues.

You can use social networking sites to:

- ✓ Establishing a simple Web presence
- ✓ Promoting specific actions or petitions
- ✓ Consolidating existing, unofficial social networks related to your organization
- ✓ Informal outreach that blends the personal and professional
- ✓ Researching VIPs, potential employees, and others
- ✓ Strengthening relationships between people who already know each other
- ✓ Encourage and respond to constituent feedback quickly

More info:

<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page5504.cfm>

http://www.idealware.org/articles/should_you_social_network.php

Why the community service and volunteer field should use it:

How to boost your community service or volunteer program by using social networking

Make Volunteering Matter – In online social networks, we need to make volunteering matter!

Inherent in the DNA of social networking is how people define themselves, engage with each other, and build communities. If you care about volunteering and civic engagement, you will make social networking central to what you do. Become David Eisner's friend on Facebook; create a profile on a social networking site; upload photos from your volunteer projects to Flickr or video to YouTube; blog about your volunteer experience; add the "I'm a Volunteer" badge widget to your website.

Use your social networks to share your story and make volunteering matter to the people around

How to do it?

Check out this video on “Social Networking in Plain English” from the Common Craft Show:
<http://www.commoncraft.com/video-social-networking>

Examples

*** Community service and volunteering examples:

Learn and Serve America on Social Networking Service – Friend Learn and Serve America on Facebook and promote their Higher Ed College Student Social Media Initiative by becoming a fan.
<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1268407648>

Idealist.org has embraced social networking and social media. Visit the social networking site specifically for nonprofits and volunteers. You can create your own profile, subscribe to their blogs, listen to a podcast, and post your volunteer or staffing positions online. www.idealist.org

Keep in mind

Social networks can help your organization connect with similar nonprofits and the general population, but these sites are not without their share of obstacles. In a recent TechSoup online event on social networking, participants discussed some common social networking challenges and offered suggestions for overcoming them.

Because many nonprofits lack the time to investigate multiple online communities or manage accounts on a handful of sites, many have suggested that they would benefit from the ability to log onto multiple platforms using a single tool, although a fully functional, cross-platform social network log-in tool does not currently exist.

Because each online community has its own unique user base, it can be difficult for an organization to reach all of its potential volunteers, donors, and sympathizers unless it is willing to invest the time and effort to manage profiles on each site.

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Six Signs that Social Networking Isn't for You

1. You're still trying to get a handle on your basic software infrastructure.
2. Your target audiences aren't using social networking tools.
3. You don't have time to experiment with something that might not work.
4. You're not willing to deal with technologies that don't work as well as they could.
5. You're not ready to invest in gaining a real understanding of the medium.
6. You want clear editorial control over your brand and message.

http://www.idealware.org/articles/should_you_social_network.php