

## Using Social Media to promote environmental action



Social media has quickly become an essential marketing and communications tool for private, public and non-governmental entities across the world to promote their organisation's mission, daily events and publications. It is frequently used for disseminating information such as press releases or other news bulletins. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube create some of the largest networks of people across all professions, cultures, and countries. Messages transmitted across these platforms have the power to go viral or spread to other social media fora within seconds. This vast potential is a gold mine for any marketing executive trying to boost a company's public image at little or no cost!

Other social media sites include: Instagram, Pinterest, Wikipedia, Google+ and Foursquare among others; of which Facebook has captured an audience of approximately 1.234 billion people at the end of 2013. According to carbonneutral.com, in 2012 it was reported that out of all internet users, 67 percent use social networks regularly. In the last year alone, Twitter has seen a 40 percent increase in active users and Facebook has seen a 37percent growth in users. LinkedIn, which is arguably the social network for business, now has over 200 million members worldwide and professionals are signing up to join the network at a rate of more than two new members per second.

So how do we leverage on this medium to promote environmental awareness? Many citizens use social media to post or share real time photos on a variety of environmental issues such as pollution or littering, forest fires, reported chemical spills in waterways, illegal dumping, and injured or deceased endangered animals. This simple yet effective action can result in prompt awareness of an environmental incident and timely response from various agencies responsible for the environment. Many entities can gain negative publicity from this proactive approach,

however, this can also be a good opportunity to gain or enhance one's corporate image by responding promptly and efficiently to online complaints. Feedback is critical to any organisation's operations, and social media allows for a direct, informal conversation between the ordinary citizen and the organisation, thus broadening the channels of communications.

Likewise, social media can inspire environmental activism through positive messages such as quotations, stories underlying environmentally - responsible behaviours, and pictures of nature among others. Messages calling for environmental sustainability can gain momentum across social media platforms as the more "likes" or shares they receive, they can eventually become a "social trend" among users.

Many organisations use social media to highlight their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts which includes environmental programmes or campaigns. As [convincedandconvert.com](http://convincedandconvert.com) summarises the relationship between social media and CSR, "companies today are not only promoting philanthropy through social networks, they're building unique Facebook pages and Twitter profiles for these important programs. All in the spirit of sharing good news, companies have a huge opportunity to ride the high wave of CSR through social media, spread the word, amplify their cause(s) and galvanize powerful network of friends."

There is an important tool in social media, the hashtag, which is used by many online users. Intended for Twitter, a shorter messaging service, the hashtag enables users to sort information by subject. For example, #WorldEnvironmentDayTT (no spaces between subjects) allows the user to find relevant content on World Environment Day activities, messages, stories, projects etc. If one intends to have his/ her post on "World Environment Day" shared with the online community, simply include the hashtag in your title #WorldEnvironmentDayTT, and your post can be seen by anyone across the world! Remember to keep your hashtag titles short and use common words such as #sustainability or #recycle if you want your post to be easily accessed!

Social media trends and analytical reports can provide organisations with a snapshot of how their pages are being used and shared by users. For example, Facebook provides a detailed analytical report featuring the number of persons talking about your page, the total reach of your content, the total number of impressions (organic and viral) and the number of subscribers to your page. This report is an excellent tool which can be utilised for measuring the effectiveness and reach of social media environmental campaigns or projects.

As demonstrated by the above, social media provides tremendous opportunities to encourage environmental activism. The most rewarding fact about social media is that, next to direct word of mouth communication, it is one of the most environmentally-friendly marketing tools out there.

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