Snapchat for Nonprofits

By Emily Garman | TheSocialAnimal.com

Is Snapchat the next big platform for online fundraising right now? NO. But fundraising is not your only goal, and besides—it's a long game, not a sprint. Nonprofits grow on a solid foundation of relationships with people based on familiarity, transparency, and trust.

You can use Snapchat to engage your younger audiences with fun photos, inspiring videos, and authentic content in order to drive them to action, and to create familiarity with your organization and mission.

Authenticity is key for organizational reputation and trust. By showcasing visuals from the field, you can assure your followers that you have "boots on the ground" in your relevant field/community. Lucky for us, animals are VERY well suited to images and video!

HOW TO SNAPCHAT

Before you do anything on Snapchat, let's take a little crash course in how it works. It's different from—and sometimes counterintuitive to—other types of social media. There's no "news feed" on Snapchat. Instead of tapping or clicking, there's a lot more swiping. Snapchat's two main functions are "Snaps" and "Stories."

SNAPS 💬

Snaps are quick photos or videos that you can overlay with text, filters or lenses (those things that make your face look like a bear with makeup) you take with the app that get sent to your friends.

A snap deletes itself 10 seconds after the person watches it. If you send or receive a snap that you want to save, you can save it to your "Memories" tab, where anyone can view your collection of individually saved Snaps.

Snaps are designed for one-to-one or one-to-several communication, not general public broadcasts.

STORIES 📑

That's where Stories come in. Stories can be visible for everyone to watch, and can be very useful for nonprofits. With the right person or team behind the scenes, nonprofits can leverage Snapchat to give a creative spin on visual storytelling.

For example, if you have an adoption event happening, why not put together a few Snaps to Stories that show off how much fun everyone's having and what a big impact the event is having on the community?

If it's new donors and a more engaged public you need, put together some Snaps that tell a cohesive narrative when put to Stories. For example, you can put together Snaps of animals that are up for adoption, or "before and after" of a shaggy dog getting groomed and ready for adoption. Use snaps to tell stories of how your organization is affecting change in the community you serve.

GEOFILTERS

We've all seen photos people have taken on Snapchat and shared on other social media—pictures where their faces look like panda bears, or have giant flower wreaths on their heads and sparkly eyes. These are Snapchat "lenses." When you are taking a picture in Snapchat, you can select from a variety of lenses and filters (filters are simpler borders or graphics that just lay on top of your image).

You can create something as complex as an augmented reality lens that interacts with an image or video completely, or a filter as simple as a colored border with your logo and a line or two of text. (No phone numbers, URLs or hashtags are allowed.)

You can also specify a geographical area and time frame (no longer than 30 days) in which the filter or lens is available. This can get very specific. For example, you can make the available area as small as your building or campus. You can create filters that people can only use when they are in your facility, or attending an event in a specific location. Snapchat users LOVE geofilters, because they are exclusive and let them show their friends where they are and what they are doing.

Snapchat does charge you to create a geofilter, but the costs are relatively low. For example, you could make a holiday geofilter, available only for people visiting your shelter, and available only for the month of December, for about $60. You'll also get statistics back on your geofilter, like how many times it was used, when, etc.

5 WAYS TO USE GEOFILTERS

1. Almost every day is "National _____ Day" or week or month. Create a geofilter to promote one of those days particularly relevant to your cause. (How about "National Best Friend Day"?)

2. Create a geofilter around a big event or fundraiser or party to create exclusivity.

3. Encourage spay/neuter awareness. This one might be a little PG-13, but you could create a filter that puts "testicles" on anything in the photo. This would need to be accompanied by some explanatory text and good-natured humor, of course!

4. You don't have to just create geofilters for YOUR locations. Create them for local dog parks, for example, and people will see your filters while they are there. This increases awareness, which means more people will think of you when it's time to recommend/volunteer/spay/neuter/donate.

5. Make a coupon. Allow people to get a free shirt, $$ off an adoption fee or whatever you choose. All they have to do is show their snap to the person at the register.
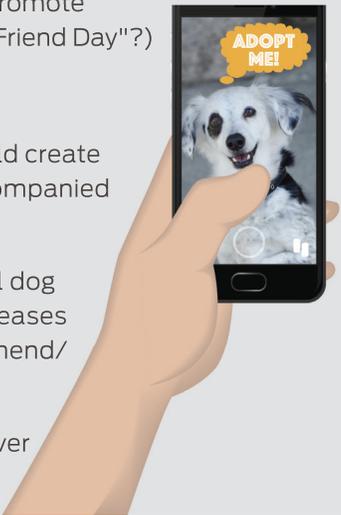
Adopting a Snapchat strategy for your organization is not going to transform your community engagement overnight and result in millions of dollars in extra donations. But it WILL help keep you at top of mind for a younger audience of people who will volunteer and adopt, and as they grow older and get better jobs, will donate. If you've got an interested volunteer or staff member, give it a try! A new population of loyal, engaged supporters is never a bad thing, and Snapchat provides a way to start building relationships with them.

Emily Garman has been a foster mom and animal welfare volunteer for 20 years, and founded **TheSocialAnimal.com** in 2008 to teach animal advocates how to use social media to raise money, recruit volunteers and save more lives. She presents on next-generation fundraising, social media and internet marketing all over North America.