

# Mixing Social Media Tools with Marketing Communications for Arts Organizations

By Beth Kanter and Rebecca Krause-Hardie

You've probably been reading about Web 2.0, social networking sites like Facebook, and all sorts of buzz words like user generated content. Maybe you are wondering where to begin and how to integrate these tools into your arts organization's relationship marketing tool box. Or maybe you've done a bit of research and experimentation with the tools, but need to convince skeptics on your management team. As you look at your spiffy new logo and marketing tagline, you sigh and wonder if you'll lose control of your carefully crafted branding. You scratch your head as you watch a young intern download and listen to a podcast on their ipod, while 'friending' people on Facebook. You wonder what is the right way to go?

This article will take you through a quick primer of some key social media terms and concepts; and the personal experiences of a handful of senior executives in arts organizations who are beginning to experiment with Web 2.0 to expand their audiences.

## Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a different way to use the Internet. You can instantly collaborate, share information, or find people who are interested in your organization's work or programs. Web 2.0 involves the concepts of transparency, listening, conversation, connecting, and collaborating. This is a profound shift from the "old way" of using the Internet or Web 1.0 which was about consuming information, reading, or browsing as a solitary act, alone in your silo. The term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2003.

Web 2.0 is also a different way of thinking for marketing directors. Seth Godin speaks of 'flipping the funnel', so that rather than broadcasting with a megaphone, you are listening. You are connecting through conversations, not with speeches and highly edited press releases, but with a dialogue rather than a monologue. Your audience can participate in creating and mixing the content, whether it's promotional content or, in some cases, even the artistic product.

Transparency is also an important concept. Some refer to this as 'being naked.' That can be uncomfortable for many organizations that are not used to being in the limelight. There is a huge difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 as it relates to transparency. Remember the *New Yorker* Cartoon in the early 1900s, when the Web first took off, that said, "No one knows you're a dog on the internet!" In Web 2.0 your dog can have a Facebook profile, doggie friends and exchange retrieving videos!

Web 2.0 tools can't be adopted with an old mind set for two reasons. You will surely not reap all the benefits and your audience will rapidly detect your lack of commitment to a dialog and transparency ... have your intern crank up your web 2.0 stuff with you!

## Social Networking

Another concept to understand is social networks. According to Wikipedia, the definition of a social network is:

**"a map of the relationships between individuals, indicating the ways in which they are connected through various social familiarities ranging from casual acquaintance to close familial bonds. Sites like MySpace and Facebook are called**

**‘social networking’ sites because they are designed to build and cultivate personal social networks.”**

The value of social networks is that they can get things done. They can help you get a job, find money, get recommendations, and even find a partner. You know how it works ... you meet Janel at a conference. She gives you her business card. You follow up with her and stay in touch. A few months later, you're looking for a new job. You tell Janel, and pass along your resume. Janel knows Sully and passes along your resume. Sully knows Joyce, who knows Marshall who knows Françoise. And eventually, Françoise gets a copy of your resume and is impressed. She has a job for you!

The problem with social networks - in the real world - is that the relationships between people aren't always visible; they're often under the traditional formal structural radar. Using social networks on the Internet, you can immediately see the connections between your contacts and the contacts, of your contacts ... one of those “aha” moments!

You might be thinking, so what has that got to do with my theatre company? More and more nonprofits are turning to social networking sites to build profiles for their programs or causes to generate leads. They are finding that these connections are good opportunities to build awareness and generate new unimagined network links for their programs. One organization was able to add 500 new names to its mailing list just through its MySpace Profile. Think about the multiple ROI of social network lead generation for a moment. Of course, there is another compelling reason for your arts organization to be interested in social networking sites: to reach younger audiences who are the most typical users.

**But how do I convince senior management that I'm not crazy?**

It is important to remember that you are not being forced to throw out your traditional communications strategies. They still work! We are talking about blending. Once you have an understanding of the new way the Internet is working, you should begin with some low risk experiments. You define outcomes, some metrics, and put it forth. You improve as you go.

Here are some lessons learned from real world experiments of blending social media strategies for arts marketing.

**Tech Tip: Hartford Stage - *Think Conversation, It's not a Billboard***

Julie Stapf, Director of Marketing and Sales for the Hartford Stage Theatre, describes her view of Social Networking like this: “It’s a long term audience building project. It’s kind of like going to parties and networking with folks who are (demographically likely patrons), except doing it on the Internet. You are going around and showing your face and saying ‘Hi’. It gives you the opportunity to make a connection with them and to tell them something about yourself. Hopefully by building this relationship you are then able to extend an invitation to them to come to the theatre.

“These social networking accounts can’t be - must not be - static like our website. Our website, like most, is used pretty much as a tool to buy tickets. We use Google Analytics, which shows that they come because they already know something about us, they know our web address like they know our phone number, and are coming to buy tickets. They don’t visit the history page, or the information about every play that’s been done since the beginning of time”.

Facebook and MySpace sites will just sit there if you put them up and leave them as a static entity. You don't get a lot of friends. You have to reach out. Making 'friends' is the first action step.

Continues Stapf, "Our interns are going out there as the Hartford Stage. They are the face of the Hartford Stage, as is the Director, the Front of House Manager, the Group Sales Manager, and the usher that greets you. It's the same when they go out on the Internet – they are the face of the institution. We feel so strongly about this idea that it has become the theme for all our new marketing materials this coming year."

The Hartford Stage, through its interns, identified Facebook networks and groups of people who expressed a particular interest in theater. These people were sent invitations through Facebook for a special offer, which resulted in over a hundred new 'friends'. While it's too early to translate this into tickets, it's a powerful step in that direction.

"It doesn't replace our other activities," says Stapf, "but represents another segment, and requires us as arts groups to be much more sophisticated in how we talk about segmenting. It's not just about demographics, but also about how our audiences get information, how they consume news."

It's pretty labor intensive and Ms. Stapf sees it as a long term audience building project similar to group sales. Ms. Stapf recalled a recent conversation with Invitation to the Party author Donna Walker-Kuhne. Walker-Kuhne was making the point that in building a successful program, the common mistake that arts organizations make is thinking in too short a time period. According to Walker-Kuhne they say, "Hey, I got a two-year grant. I'm going to put together this program in two years. I'm going to hire somebody, etc. and within two years we're going to be raking in the dough off of all our community outreach programs."

In practice, it just doesn't happen, because two years isn't enough time. Five years, in Walker-Kuhne's mind, is the minimum commitment to building a really strong and successful social networking program. Stapf says, "And while I don't know that it will take 5 years, it is a long term investment in what is another layer of our marketing program."

One of the reasons arts institutions do not have an alignment around the value of some of these ideas – like social networking, is because of this short term focus.

"This has always been one of the burdens of marketing directors," says Ms. Stapf. "We have lots of conversations about marketing best practices and putting things into place that are going to build us longer term as institutions. But short term when you sit down to do that budget it is so lean, and in non-profits in particular, you don't have that R&D development. You literally get to these points where you say, "We could run a couple more radio spots, which I know are going to produce X amount of audience for me more or less, or I can take that money and invest it in social networking which right now is not bringing a lot of money in the door, but which is a significant, self sustaining, viral audience multiplier ... down stream. Somehow we have to find a way to do both."

**TECH TIP: THE METROPOLITAN OPERA – *Always Keep Your Core Values in Focus***

As one listens to Elena Park, Assistant Manager for Editorial & Creative Content at the Metropolitan Opera, talk about what is currently going on at the Met, one can't help but think of Jim Collins' book, Good to Great, and his idea that everyone should get on the bus and go in the same direction, with Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGs).

Whether it is Web 2.0, wig design or *Playbill* content, everything at the Met (and they really mean everything) comes back to core guiding principles. Says Park, "Our thinking about the Web ties in with the overall philosophy of the Met under the leadership of Peter Gelb. Peter wants to take away the veil of formality that envelops the Met. It's really about access and opening up this place, which has so many stories and so much behind-the-scenes drama."

Gelb has made a huge commitment to opening up the Met to a broader public, and to sharing its great stories and music, without compromising artistic content.

This is an adjustment for some, and it requires an understanding on the part of the artists and directors to open up and reveal what is happening before opening night or dress rehearsals.

Ms. Park notes, however, that both cast and crew have "been game," explaining how they used a sports model for their radio and HD broadcasts:

"We're interviewing them live during intermission. It's a new experience and it's very exciting. We don't always know what is going to happen. This new approach is very much in keeping with Peter's background as a producer for the Met in the 80's. People are excited, and they are responding. One of the most memorable experiences was giving away 3000 tickets for our first Open House. People were walking around backstage, and there was such a thrill generated internally by seeing all the people that wanted to come to the Met."

This energy translates into people buying more tickets, and the Met reaching a broader audience. After five years of steadily declining ticket sales, this year the Met box office was up 7%.

At the Met, everything is rolled out from a central governing approach. When they think about questions like: "How do we use Web 2.0? How do we take advantage of all the technology available to us to have a social conversation and link people?" they are also asking, "What does a live HD transmission mean in terms of stage lighting, or more generally giving people access?"

The Met's website was revamped last year. The first phase of this project was to convert the site from a purely ticketing and sales oriented vehicle to an editorial destination. The site is rich with editorial and media content, including multimedia interviews with artists and directors, in-depth articles, video and audio clips, blog posts with insider perspectives on upcoming productions, as well as links to their "Live in HD" broadcast series and Sirius Radio Channel.

A key part of the Met's new strategy is forging links with contemporary culture. Park says that "cultural conversation pieces" that appear on the website or in Met publications will help people find points of access to opera and to the Met.

"People might not be thinking about going to the Met website, but find their way there through these [other] links and connections... Much of our content appeals both to the connoisseur as

well as to people that might come across it inadvertently. That might be the interview with Academy Award–winning filmmaker Anthony Minghella in his role as director of the new production of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, or the challenges Anna Netrebko faced in performing the ‘mad scene’ in *I Puritani*.”

The Metropolitan Opera’s web traffic has increased over 37% from a year ago, and online sales have gone up over 25% in the same time period, so it’s clear that they are meeting with some success. But meeting the challenges of accessing a broader audience through the Met is a constant process.

As Park notes: “What we’re working on now is the next phase of our web presence. We’re thinking about how it can be more interactive, have a greater sense of community, and link the international network of opera lovers together. We have extensive media agreements that allow us tremendous flexibility to utilize our huge archives of video and audio footage.

“Things we need to be focusing on – whether that’s making the Met’s MySpace site a cool destination, or creating more forums for conversations and discussions – are all about creating this sense of community.”

One of the things that is challenging not only for the Met, but for any arts organization, is acquiring and responding to audience feedback. If you have an open forum where people are talking about performances or repertoire, you want it to be free flowing. At the same time, particularly with opera, people have very strong and sometimes over-the-top opinions. The Brooklyn Museum, Park says, was able to create an open forum and in so doing, earned praise from audiences and industry insiders alike. Guided by the understanding that is important to invite conversation that is entertaining as well as enlightening, the Met is garnering similar praise.

This holistic approach, Park says, is a reflection of the Met’s “core values.” Park believes that an important part of this new strategy is their web presence, saying,

“Our web strategy reflects our identity. When things are considered more holistically, the results in the long term will be better. If an idea is great, it will work on every level – whether that be artistic, fundraising or marketing. If we try something new – like HD – and people respond, then funding falls into place. If the product is compelling and the buzz is really good, and if you are able to talk about it in every single form in which you are communicating with the public, then you’ve met your goal: a positive audience response. At the end of the day, if you give people captivating images and fascinating stories, then naturally they will be interested in buying tickets.”

### **Tech Tip: Detroit Symphony - *Speak with an Authentic Voice***

In 2004, the Detroit Symphony was one of the very first orchestras to present performances of the music from the video game ‘Final Fantasy’. This provided an ideal tool to test and explore viral marketing on the web. This specialized audience was cultivated with a full traditional marketing plan of direct mail, TV, radio, Postering, Banners, etc.

The web portion of the plan included visits to game chat rooms and “talking up” this cool event by providing “inside scoops.” The “talking up” part was provided by actual game players who could ensure that the voices online were authentic and appropriate. Their job was to influence the opinion leaders of the web. This would never have been successful if non-gamers had gone

in with no understanding of the jargon and game-speak.

Other web activities in support of these concerts included partnerships and promotions on game and video sites such as that of “Final Fantasy” developer Square-Enix and on animation sites like anime.com.

### **Tech Tip: New York Philharmonic – Use Web 2.0 to Build Brand Loyalty**

New York Philharmonic Marketing Director, David Snead is in the midst of hiring their second web person and a “web strategizer” – someone to help them design and implement web projects. They’d like to duplicate the success in building loyalty and audiences of some of today’s commercial artists. Granted, generally we are speaking of younger demographics than for orchestras, but in terms of technology life-cycles use of social networking tools is quickly moving beyond the scope of “early adopters”, to the more conservative “early majority” folks. The opening of FaceBook to the general population, and its recent adoption by highly correlated likely patrons, is a good example of this.

Snead sees their web initiatives as a key element of a broader marketing strategy to “turn people on to the music.” Current web endeavors include ring tones, web streaming of concerts, downloads on iTunes, and online video interviews with guest artists also available as podcasts. Visitors to the site can use RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, allowing them to get up-to-date information without having to visit the site.

In addition to the “formal” voice of the institution, there is a strong presence of “individual voices” represented on the social networking sites. For example, many younger players in the orchestra like Principal Oboist Liang Wang, or violinist Yulia Ziskel, have their own MySpace sites.

The Philharmonic also employs a robust outbound e-marketing effort to communicate with its audience: they email advance program notes, customer service notices, and occasional ticket discount offers. 45% of their single tickets are now sold online. Overall, \$7.3 million tickets (amounting to 35% of all ticket revenue) are purchased online.

### **Tech Tip: Atlanta Symphony – Use Training as a Tool to Build Institutional Support**

“We’re integrating our own version of social networking into our website,” says Atlanta Symphony Internet and Database Manager, Vince Ford.

“Our focus with this particular project is to deepen the relationship we have with the people already coming to see us.”

The Atlanta Symphony has information on the site that they think audience members will want to engage with, like composer biographies, event details, musician biographies, and program notes on a particular piece of music. Audience members can then enrich the content by adding their own perspective to it ... ultimately creating new content.

Whenever a piece of music is mentioned, a place is available for people to comment. These comments might include memories of the first time they heard that piece, or played it in high school band, or college, or when they heard it in a prior concert, whatever direction they want to take with that. This will include concerts, once they have taken place. Of course a lot of monitoring goes along with this. There are some challenges. When somebody writes something

that is factually correct, but maybe difficult in some way for the institution to hear, they have to find where it fits. They won't just reject the difficult stuff. These sorts of conversations don't work if it's all fluff.

When audience members post their comments, they will also include "key word" tags to go along with them. This has multidimensional results. It is helpful in searching the site, and it informs the marketing department about the words and connections the audience makes, rather than the connections we as the institution guess that they will make. It's free market research!

"This new sub-channel within the site is about enriching other people's perspective; as well as creating new pathways for navigating the site. This is another step in encouraging the audience to converse with each other, and with us, online", says Ford.

"Initially we will have to cultivate this with our audience because it's completely new for them, and us. We will be building awareness of the new features in our weekly email newsletters, radio and print spots and program notes. We also plan to seed initial conversations to get and keep activity going. Our goal is to extend the sense of loyalty with the consumer. As that relationship grows and strengthens, they are spending more time with us, developing a deeper connection with our products and we think, spending more money. It's a way to incubate (relationships) online."

Another role Vince plays is as an evangelist or champion within the institution. Throughout the year Vince is sitting down with staff members and helping them to get online. This ranges from showing them how to create a MySpace page, or how to log into Second Life, or FaceBook or upload pictures to Flickr.

"Even if they don't stay there, this 'hands on' approach is a much more effective way to get them engaged in the web conversation, than say, making a presentation in the board room. When it comes time to brainstorm about project ideas, there's a much stronger base of understanding and support."

### **Tech Tip: Pittsburgh Symphony – Build on Institutional Strengths**

Like most performing arts groups, budgets are tight at the Pittsburgh Symphony, so projects that can be done by volunteers, or as part of someone's day to day job, or require limited funds, have been the primary focus. This is not to say the senior staff is not interested in social networking tools. Larry Tamburri, the PSO President, was strongly in favor of exploring activities like blogging. A number of basic projects have been undertaken including podcasts, blogs, MySpace Page, video posts to YouTube, as well as some more unique projects like web talk shows, and blog fests.

A strong team atmosphere as well as some key volunteers has been crucial. Says Jeff Tsai, Director of Corporate Support & Special Projects, "A wonderful resource in the orchestra is horn player Bob Lauer. He's accustomed to bringing a camcorder into places we go or when interesting things are going on. For instance we recently played Messiaen's Turangalila featuring the weird and wonderful instrument, the Ondes Martenot. Bob filmed this whole behind-the-scenes video for YouTube, with a good portion of the brass section and the Ondes Martenot player talking about what it is, and how it works.

"Bob's also been involved with our web talk shows. We use a technology called 'Talkshoe', developed by a former Pittsburgh Symphony Board member, which allows people to host web-

based talk shows. After a recent concert, the horn section remained on stage and hosted the show. People could call in, email or use a 'chat' function to pose their questions. At the end of the show, an MP3 of the event provided a ready-made podcast. The Talkshoe model also includes a revenue sharing feature that generates ad income for the host, based on traffic to the site."

"We also have four blog hosts for our site. When we originally started our work, we wanted it to be a little different - not just having voices from within the orchestra, but invite outside opinion. The original purpose was to drive more web traffic, and therefore more foot traffic to the symphony. We had this naive idea that the involvement of volunteer writers would somehow duplicate the role of newspapers - magically at 1:00 am after a concert, blogs would appear about the concert, people would flood the site to read and comment, and ticket sales would soar. In reality, blog posts are often a week or more after an event, too late to drive traffic. If one takes away the 'volunteer' aspect it derails the purpose of having the blog. In the abstract we hope that the audience wants to read everything, but ultimately it's the author's individual voices that are interesting, not the organization.

Other projects have included hosting "blog fests" where members of the local blogging community are invited to come to concerts and then write about them on their blogs. IT Manager, Kevin DeLuca created short videos of upcoming events featuring musicians in the orchestra. For example, Principal Bassoonist, Nancy Goeres talks about the special role the bassoon plays in the *Rite of Spring*, both the genuine excitement, and real fear, around the unusual solos.

While there is not "risk capital" available for more extensive social networking activities at this time, there do seem to be some openings falling into place within the framework of their overall institutional goals. One of these goals is to build loyalty and create value through life long relationships (from the point of first contact, to their bequest). Key elements include: combining all the institutional relationships with a given household into one unit, building commitment, and creating easy and intuitive ways to connect with the symphony. Social networking activities could be a perfect fit.

### **A few insights and observations**

When all is said and done, we come back to a few core basics that seem to apply whether we are talking about Web 2.0, or the box office. It's all about a dialog and not a monolog. It's about listening, learning, communicating and having a conversation, in a voice that is authentic and keeps the customer's perspective front and center.

Our core values drive all the work that we do and how and why we do it. Building on our institutional strengths produces and leverages powerful results. Build and nurture transparency and community both inside and outside the institution through broadly inclusive training and social networking.

Occasionally stick your head up and look about with a longer telescope. People are very forgiving, if your heart's in the right place and If you are reaching out and listening. It doesn't take big bucks or heroics, just a growing, institution wide, commitment to customer service.



## Further Resources

Ready to dive deeper in to understanding Web 2.0 tools and techniques in this article?

### Here's a few places to get started:

#### Web 2.0

- Still trying to wrap your brain around Web 2.0, check out this YouTube video called *The Machine is Using Us* by Michael Wesch. It explains Web 2.0 in less than 5 minutes and quickly became one of the most popular videos in the blogosphere.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT_g)

- What is Web 2.0?, by Tim O'Reilly, who wrote the first and most influential concept paper on Web 2.0. September, 2005

<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>

#### Social Media

- Even though the title says "Business," Robin Good's Ten Ways to Promote Your Business With Social Media is packed with practical advice that is applicable to nonprofits.

[http://www.masternewmedia.org/online\\_marketing/social-media-marketing-smm-smo/online-marketing-strategies-tools-10-ways-social-media-marketing-20070525.htm](http://www.masternewmedia.org/online_marketing/social-media-marketing-smm-smo/online-marketing-strategies-tools-10-ways-social-media-marketing-20070525.htm)

- If you want to keep up with social media trends, here's a list of the top social marketing blogs

[http://moblogsmoproblems.blogspot.com/2007/06/viral-gardens-top-25-marketing-blogs\\_13.html](http://moblogsmoproblems.blogspot.com/2007/06/viral-gardens-top-25-marketing-blogs_13.html) to read.

- And, finally, be sure to read the classic on social media and marketing by Seth Godin, Flipping the Funnel.

[http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog/2006/01/flipping\\_the\\_fu.html](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2006/01/flipping_the_fu.html)

You can find many more resources and links for nonprofit arts organizations at the *Mixing Social Media with Fundraising* Wiki. A wiki is a collaborative website which can be directly edited by anyone with access to it. The wiki includes the best of the best primers on the tools and lots more examples.

<http://fundraising20.wikispaces.com>