

## **A Best Practice: Using Social Media for Sexual Violence Prevention**

*This position paper on best practice reflects the views of the Prevention and Education Committee of the Task Force and was approved by the Task Force Steering Committee on March 11, 2014.*

### **Abstract**

Social media has been used extensively to promote health issues in recent years. The Prevention and Education Subcommittee of the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force sees social media as having immediate and direct applicability to sexual violence prevention. This paper covers the definition and purpose of social media; how social media can be used to build a movement; and how social media can be used in sexual violence prevention, including suggested uses and such other considerations as pitfalls and best practices. We conclude with recommended uses of social media, including those made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other organizations. Recommendations include using social media as part of overall campaign or organizational goals and strategies, and using social media as a dynamic process with target audiences. The wide reach of social media and the nature of online communication show that messages have a longer life than a campaign timeline might. Therefore, it is recommended that organizations use language very intentionally, and that campaign and organizational messages be pre-tested and edited to minimize the possibility of unintentional misuses of sexual violence prevention language. Finally, because the dynamic nature of social media campaigns require active and ongoing organizational involvement, successful social media campaigns will be based on a realistic assessment of organizational capacity.

### **I. Introduction**

Social media has become a primary communication medium in the developed world over the past decade (Leiner et al., 2009). Due to increased globalization, facilitated in part by widespread use of the Internet and social media, this medium allows for the widespread and fast dissemination of information and ideas (Briggs & Burke, 2010). Much work has been done over the past several years to use social media to raise awareness around social and political issues, such as sexual violence. Given this trend, it is important that relevant organizations and stakeholders in the struggle against sexual violence engage in a discourse that addresses and discusses how social media can be used to prevent this ongoing epidemic, and provides strategies to react to the rapidly changing nature of social media outlets and trends. Thus, the primary purpose of this paper is to make clear the Oregon Attorney General's

Sexual Assault Task Force's Prevention and Education Subcommittee's position on the best practices for using social media in the prevention of sexual violence.

***Definition & Purpose of Social Media and Marketing.*** Broadly speaking, *social media is an Internet-based medium for communication used for personal, business, and/or political purposes.* Over the past couple of decades, this particular communications medium has integrated in-person interactions with the growing capabilities of the Internet to become a normal component of everyday life for ever-increasing numbers of individuals. This is especially true in developed and developing countries, where access to Internet-capable technology has become more readily available (Hughes, 2010). As more individuals have become increasingly involved with social media, so have many companies, organizations, and political campaigns. In fact, for many regions of the world, the use of social media has become critical to the success of such agencies or agendas. Thus, as is further explained in subsequent sections, the use of social media and marketing can be a powerful tool to change norms and attitudes that endorse sexual violence. Such work is crucial to the current agenda(s) in the struggle against the world-wide sexual violence epidemic.

The effectiveness of social marketing, or the use of marketing to design and implement programs to promote socially beneficial behavior change (Grier & Bryant, 2004), has been recognized by professionals in many different prevention fields. In the past few years, social marketing has become a much more widely accessible tool due to the advent of *social media*. Hughes (2010) describes social media as:

**“... less about the actual technology, and more about the way it enables individuals to interact online.** Social media has the innate ability to communicate information in real time, as well as link groups of people together around common issues. Accordingly, today's most effective

public health-driven social marketing campaigns use or incorporate social media technologies to amplify awareness, and impact attitudes and health behaviors ” (Hughes, 2010 pg3).

Although Hughes gives us a good starting vantage point to think about social media, it is important to keep in mind that social media and its applications are fluid, changing and growing at a rate faster than the accompanying scholarly research and evidence. While this paper captures the social media sphere to date, there are new types of social media and new applications for existing media emerging daily. Key social media tools and trends that emerge over time will need to be considered and assessed according to the guidelines included here.

***Types of Social Media.*** Social media can take on many different forms, including: online applications; forums and message boards; blogs; social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and Pinterest; wikis; podcasts; viral image and video campaigns; and mobile applications that provide constant direct contact to a target audience. Gaming, whether through the Internet or through consoles such as Nintendo or PlayStation, also has an increasingly heavy social media component.

1. Forums and message boards: Internet forums and message boards are online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. They differ from chat rooms in that messages are at least temporarily archived. Also, depending on the access level of a user or the forum set-up, a posted message might need to be approved by a moderator before it becomes visible to other users. Message posts are typically displayed as a “thread,” with conversations shown in a chronological and hierarchical way.
2. Blogs: A blog is a web site containing the writer's or group of writers' own experiences, observations, opinions, etc., and often having images and links to other web sites.

Readers can subscribe to blogs, and share blog posts via social networking sites or email.

Readers can also enter and respond to comments, which may or may not be moderated by the owner of the blog.

3. Social networking sites: Social networking is the use of web sites or other online technologies to communicate with people and share information, resources, etc. Sites such as Facebook allow users to create profiles, including personal information, interests and activities, and photos. Users can then “friend” other users to create an online social network where users share stories, pictures, news, events, and other information with their social networks and friends. Twitter allows users to “follow” other users. Unlike Facebook, Twitter is used primarily to give short “tweets” of information about events and news, and followers are updated about any new tweets that other users they follow make. Pinterest is similar to Twitter in that users are able to view posts of pictures (instead of text), follow other users’ photo posts, and share their own. Pinterest groups posts by categories, such as home decorating, weddings, food, and fashion. Any of these social networking sites can be used by both individuals and groups through individual and group accounts.
4. Wikis: A wiki is a Web site that allows anyone to add, delete, or revise content by using a web browser. The most popular and well-known use of this kind of application is Wikipedia, although smaller and more personalized wikis are set up for small groups, including college classes and organizations.
5. Podcasts: A podcast is a digital audio or video file or recording, usually part of a themed series that can be downloaded from a Web site to a media player or computer. Many news organizations offer podcasts, as do radio personalities and talk shows. Virtually

anyone can produce a podcast, given they have access to recording equipment and a computer. Producers generally have to pay for any downloads, but can also be sponsored by advertisers and other businesses which can help pay for downloads by followers and listeners.

6. Image & video sharing: Images can be shared via many sites, including Flickr, Shutterfly, Snapchat, and Picasa. Video sharing can be done through YouTube and Google Video. In addition to sharing videos and images, many of these sites also allow users to comment on and/or show support for posted videos and images, which can stimulate conversation.
7. Mobile Devices: Mobile devices, such as cell phones and tablets, allow access to websites, downloadable mobile applications, and “push notification” and texting campaigns. Creating mobile websites can be helpful for individuals using mobile phones to access information about an organization or business. Mobile devices use smart phone capabilities to provide a simple way for users to stay in touch with an organization or business. Texting and push notification campaigns deliver text and/or popup messages to subscribers with relevant information pertaining to the initiating organization or causes. . They can be reminders, or provide event information or other resources. Many mobile devices also have global positioning capabilities that are often used by organizations, businesses, causes, and individuals to deliver location information for events and can also be used to track individuals’ locations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to section V. “Additional Considerations and Concerns,” below, for a discussion on safety considerations accompanying the use of global positioning capabilities.

8. Gaming: Gaming is the running of specialized applications known as electronic games, especially on machines designed for such programs and, in a more recent trend, using personal computers on the Internet in which case the activity is known as online gaming. A person who plays electronic games is called a gamer . Gaming today has a heavy social media component as gamers create online characters or profiles through the game which they play on a team with or against other people's online profiles or characters. "Current research suggests a link between [gaming and] negative attitudes toward women and violence against women, and it also suggests that media may condition such negative attitudes." One study found that "a video game depicting sexual objectification of women and violence against women resulted in statistically significant increased rape myths acceptance (rape-supportive attitudes) for male study participants" (Beck, et al., 2012). The introduction of a feminist perspective within the on-line gaming community provides not only a powerful example of the entrenchment of negative gender norms in games but also the positive possibilities of challenging them.<sup>2</sup>

## **II. Using social media to build momentum behind a movement (general)**

Bandura explained how social cognitive theory is helpful in describing how media impacts behaviors:

"Social cognitive theory analyzes social diffusion of new behavior patterns in terms of three constituent processes and the psychosocial factors that govern them. These include the

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<sup>2</sup> See, <http://www.upworthy.com/a-bunch-of-sad-insecure-dudes-attacked-a-woman-and-everyone-got-what-they-deserv?c=upw7>

acquisition of knowledge about innovative behaviors, the adoption of these behaviors in practice, and the social networks through which they spread and are supported” (Bandura, 2001, 287).

In addition, diffusion of innovations theory aims to describe change as a wave passing through society, and attempts to explain how new ideas and activities are understood and adopted by populations: An innovation is adopted quickly if it has high relative advantage, high compatibility, high trial-ability, high observe-ability and low complexity. Stages of diffusion are: innovation development, dissemination, adoption, implementation, maintenance.

Applying these theories, we can see how social media, with its emphasis and reliance on social networks, is amenable to impacting knowledge and attitudes and influencing behavior among social networks, be they tightly-knit or diffuse. Little research currently exists on the specific interplay between social media and social norms and behavior change, but we can posit that it is similar to the links studied between television and news images and reporting, and norms and behaviors. We would hope, as Banyard (2004) describes the intent of bystander intervention strategies, that social media could increase the “mobilization of pro-social behavior” through effective social marketing (Banyard, 2004, 61). Below, in Section IV, are examples of successful implementations of social media strategies that have caused behavior change.

### **III. Why Social media is particularly helpful for Sexual Violence Prevention**

Social media can serve as a way to change norms about sexual assault and sexual violence by diffusing and disseminating ideas, attitudes, and knowledge among a large population or target audience. Social media can also allow the voices of survivors and (reformed and/or recovering) perpetrators to be heard. It can foster safer spaces to share stories and engage in conversations that address norms and attitudes that endorse and/or encourage sexual violence. One potentially powerful

use of social media for sexual violence prevention may be as a place for non-reformed or recovering perpetrators to gain helpful (i.e., attitude and behavior changing) perspectives from other reformed or recovering perpetrators' stories and actions in speaking out against violence.

As we use social media to increase opportunities for those whose lives have been impacted by sexual violence to safely speak out, it is important to consider how to extend access to mainstream and underrepresented communities alike. Social media and marketing campaigns have the potential to allow for an increased access to safe spaces in mainstream media and opinion for survivors among boys and men, LGBT-identified survivors, elderly survivors, female perpetrators, and others, who have faced multiple barriers to being heard in traditional media. Such work via social media and marketing campaigns allows for a more global and interconnected space that fosters conversations aimed at changing norms and attitudes in order to change behaviors and ultimately prevent the occurrence of sexual violence.

#### **IV. Suggested Uses and Examples of Success**

Using social media tools as part of an organization's overall communication goals can be fun, effective, and interactive. For example, an organization can create a Facebook page and events, and invite friends and others in the community to participate in the organization and its events. An organization can use Twitter to "tweet" short blasts and updates about campaigns and events. Organizers and participants alike can post event and campaign videos, trainings, or podcasts to YouTube. Successful campaigns strive to create content that facilitates dialogue between the organization and its target audience.

Using social media as part of an overall norms change campaign can be an effective and relatively inexpensive way to spread a campaign's message. In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified only one evidence-based type of sexual violence prevention: school-based programs to



prevent intimate partner violence. WHO identified several other prevention programs as having emerging evidence of effectiveness, including programs that attempt to change social and cultural gender norms through the use of social norms theory, media awareness campaigns, and those targeting boys and men. Incorporating social media components into these programs could bolster their efficacy by allowing participants to search for further information online, join Facebook groups, and watch extra videos on YouTube. Because many young people use social media, having extra, online components to these programs that are already evidence based, or to programs that have emerging evidence of efficacy, could increase their effectiveness at spreading awareness and knowledge among the young people they target. The increase in awareness and knowledge is a means toward achieving the overall goal of changing normative attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to better prevent sexual violence. Because social media sites allow users to see the actions of other users within or connected to their networks, engaging even a single user (e.g., who “likes,” comments on, “re-tweets” or shares content) can have a significant ripple effect that extends the reach of the content and encourages further user interaction.

Several innovative public health campaigns have leveraged various social media tools in creative ways. Moyer (2011) reported that a “study in the Sept. 30 issue of *Science* assessed Tweets to determine when people are happiest -- in the morning and on weekends. A study that appeared online Oct. 3 in *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* looked at Facebook messages to help identify college students with drinking problems.” The [“Geography of Hate”](#) project from Humboldt State University in California provides an interesting use of geo-mapping, analyzing Tweets containing key words (e.g. “homophobic”) to identify hot spots for hate speech. This approach could be used for community mobilization to change norms in communities that indicate a significant presence of pro-rape culture attitudes and beliefs.

In addition, Klein (2010) described the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's innovative use of YouTube to reach potentially suicidal or at-risk YouTube users: "Not content to merely use YouTube to post videos, this 24/7 suicide prevention hotline has partnered with the social networking site to address circumstances in which YouTube users post content that promotes suicide or suggests they are at risk. A page in YouTube's Help section refers users to the Lifeline and notes that users can flag videos for review by the YouTube team if the videos promote suicide." It would be useful to partner with YouTube to create a way for users to report abusive or violent videos, or videos that depict violent relationships or violence against women. Prevention could be strengthened by creating a related page on YouTube where users can access resources on healthy relationships and sexuality.

A text messaging service created by the San Francisco Public Health Department may serve as an example of reaching youth and young adults with sexual violence and healthy relationship messages and resources. As Hughes (2010) described:

"In 2006, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) and Internet Sexuality Information Services, Inc. (ISIS) partnered to develop "SEXINFO," a confidential text messaging service that provides teens with basic facts about sexual health and relationships, as well as referrals to youth-oriented clinics and social services offline. The service can be accessed by texting "SEXINFO" to a 5-digit number from any wireless phone. Teens can also text single digits for more tailored information. For example, by texting "5," teens can receive a text message for a free STD<sup>3</sup> checkup with a health care provider in the San Francisco area. A website – [sextextsf.org](http://sextextsf.org) – also provides sample texts. The SEXINFO program does more than just connect "texting teens" with providers offline. The program relies on a consortium of community organizations, including high school health programs, clinic staff and health agencies to assist

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<sup>3</sup> (sic). In fact the campaign focuses on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

with identifying culturally appropriate local referral services. The initial goal of the program was to decrease STI rates among adolescents in the San Francisco area. By directly providing teens with a referral for an in-person consultation with a health care provider, as opposed to simply texting sexual health messages, the service has made strides towards accomplishing this goal. A preliminary evaluation of the program found that 4,500 inquiries were sent in the first 25 weeks of the SEXINFO launch; over half led to information and referrals. Messages related to condom breakage, STIs, and pregnancy were the most common.”

Following the example of SEXINFO, creating a text messaging service that promotes healthy relationships, reminders about signs of unhealthy relationships, and resources for relationship health could be an effective way of reaching a broad audience of young people. Such a service may also serve as a means of normalizing conversations about healthy versus unhealthy relationships, and supporting survivors of sexual assault.

Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment (PAVE) and the Clery Center for Security on Campus recently launched a mobile application. The Shatter the Silence App provides education and resources to help prevent sexual violence by equipping users with knowledge, skills and services through interactive multimedia tools. Shatter The Silence also provides instant emergency functionality that will contact the police, notify chosen contacts of your location and situation using Glympse geo location technology, and connect you to immediate support from trained violence intervention specialists. Such mobile applications have the potential to connect individuals more readily to sexual violence information, services, and resources, providing both primary and secondary sexual violence prevention strategies. Another excellent example is the award-winning Circle of 6 mobile application<sup>4</sup> that allows the sender to instantly reach out to 6 friends with information about where they are and what they

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.circleof6app.com/>

need. However, geo-location applications can also have negative implications for survivors of sexual violence or people experiencing or at risk of sexual violence. Please refer to section V. “Additional Considerations and Concerns,” below, for a discussion on the negative implications of global positioning capabilities.

In December of 2012 feminist activists, FORCE: Upsetting Rape Culture launched a viral media campaign based around the website PinkLovesConsent.com, which appeared to feature Victoria’s Secret Pink Line’s new featured looks. What was surprising was that these new looks featured thongs and panties that were adorned with anti rape and consent messaging. Rebecca Adams (2012) wrote in a Huffington Post article, “according to a press release from FORCE, 100 Facebook users were in on the prank that started on Monday and “it just went viral from there.” Within hours, people began to express their gratitude to Victoria's Secret on both Twitter and Facebook. By the time these potential customers realized it was a fake, they began to come out in droves, requesting that the mass retailer produce the feminist undies using the hashtag #loveconsent. Not such a bad way to mainstream such a difficult-to-broach subject, eh?” This campaign was a huge success as it brought the conversation of rape to national attention and showed Victoria’s Secret that its customers not only desired but would support them in taking a stand against rape.

## **V. Additional Considerations and Cautions**

As with any social marketing campaign, social media is most effectively used as a part of overall communication and organizational goals; otherwise, the purpose of social media tools will be lost in the midst all of the other online communication. As Currie (2009) relates, “One common social media pitfall is... ‘shiny new object syndrome’ — the temptation to latch on to every new tool that is created.” Simply creating a Facebook page or Twitter account for one’s organization or campaign will not facilitate organizational goals; these actions must have a strategic purpose within overall goals. Similarly, without

tangible metrics and an evaluation plan, the use of social media may be ineffective in achieving larger goals. What specific things does an organization intend to measure with its social media platform (i.e., number of people who “liked” the organization’s page, number of friend requests, number of followers, number of comments, etc.)? What are these metrics proxies for?

Because the social media sphere is constantly changing and interconnected, it may be difficult to determine the extent of your reach or where and how your message is being used and/or potentially distorted. Messages can be diffused across an array of interconnected media spheres. As social media is impermanent and changing, it is important to recognize that the successes of social media campaigns are likely to be short term. Thus, it may be best to design campaigns that utilize social media in combination with, or as supplements to, larger and more permanent campaign tools. For instance, a social media campaign used to spark a conversation within a community might be more effective in the long-term than a campaign that contains a one-line message against sexual violence. In addition, one-line messages spread through social media may be more effective if the audience is directed to a specific organization or larger movement’s primary website. The “Don’t Be That Guy”<sup>5</sup> campaign, for example, distributed scenario images across the internet via social media websites (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) with a link to the movement’s website that contained explanatory information for each scenario. Further, while the success of this campaign has not been empirically tested, it is likely that by allowing individual organizations to utilize the images for redistribution, at no cost to the organizations, that this campaign has the potential for more long-term success at disseminating its messages.

Much of social media is designed to elicit response, which may require follow-up by the initiator in order to support the campaigns’ effectiveness. Thus, the need to allocate sufficient resources to ongoing support for the campaign becomes part of campaign planning. One key consideration is

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.theviolencestopshere.ca/dbtg.php>

providing audiences with adequate and readily accessible information about the possibilities for participating in a campaign's movement or organization. For example, the V-Day<sup>6</sup> campaign began by distributing a short video promoting the "One Billion Rising" event (an in-person event for raising awareness around violence against women) set to occur across the globe among individual communities and organizations. Audiences were given access to signing up their communities and/or organizations for participating in this world-wide event (videos of individual "risings" were distributed across social media, thus allowing for individuals and organizations to engage with one another from across the globe).

***Building your Audience(s) and Keeping Them Engaged.*** The foundation of a successful social media campaign is building your audience and keeping them engaged during the life of your campaign. Social marketing campaigns, like prevention, intend to encourage change, thus the success of a campaign messaging efforts depends on the participation of the intended audience. This takes time and is also an ongoing process. A great place to start could be with the organization's Board of Directors and donor base. Organizations with or without donors can engage staff and volunteers by asking them to connect with the organization via its various social media sites and encourage them to invite their own personal networks. Community members who do not have the time to support the organization in person can provide valuable support through an active social media presence.

Recruiting an audience is often the easy part. Keeping people engaged requires active facilitation of dialogue by continual and responsive posting and updating of social media sites, making available both discussion taking place within the specific campaign, as well as in the broader world. The most visited and active online communities, such as Huffington Post or Jezebel, maintain an interconnected web of social media outlets which they update constantly throughout each day.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.vday.org/home>

Having staff dedicated to this ongoing support is a key component to successful campaigning; therefore, the time that can be dedicated will determine the campaign's scope, duration and goals. Many organizations struggle to achieve clarity on what they can manage through their social media outlets. Organizations can help to ensure the success of a campaign by balancing vision and capacity; by assessing whether they have the capacity to implement the envisioned campaign, whether a smaller campaign is more appropriate, or whether a partnership might be needed to see the campaign through to the intended outcomes. Identifying the dedicated staff and ensuring that person has the skills and self-confidence to implement the campaign is also key. While community volunteers often bring enthusiasm and sometimes high-level skills that the organization could not otherwise afford, it is important to consider whether these supporters will be able to commit their time to see the campaign through.

***Disclosures, Cyberstalking, Cyberbullying and Documenting Violence on Social Media.***

Although social media has enormous potential for the prevention of sexual violence, it also has the potential to facilitate violence.

"Social media sites are spaces where abuse can occur. (MTV's 2011) digital abuse study 'A Thin Line' found that more than half (56%) of youth surveyed said they had experienced abuse through social and digital media...The study also found that 15 percent of youth reported having sent a naked photo or video of themselves and 21 percent had received naked pictures or videos of others. What is relevant here in terms of sexual violence is that the MTV study found that about half of those who had sent a nude photo felt pressured to do so (Fairbairn, et al., 2013)."

Violence that occurs digitally, often using social media sites or applications, can be referred to as "cyberbullying." Cyberbullying can come in the form of unwanted sexting, luring/online exploitation,

cyberharrsment, digital dating violence and cyberstalking. Cyberstalking is the use of social media to procure information about a person, sometimes including their actual location by the means of geolocation devices on social media applications. For example Four Square is an application that allows you to “check in” to a certain location then shares your check in on Facebook so that your friends can see that you are there an come meet up with you. Snapchat has received a lot of recent media attention because the application has been linked to cyber bullying among teens and tweens. Photos taken using the mobile application disappear a few seconds after the receiver opens them, leaving no trace or history of the image that was sent.

Documenting and reporting issues can arise from the use of social media to perpetrate violence. Some case workers routinely have to take screen shots and save direct messages, etc., as people report to them from social media sites or show violence and harassment on social media sites as evidence. This is especially important to remember when working with middle, high school, and college students. Similarly, as the world and our sexual violence prevention and intervention programs become more Internet and digitally based, disclosures are often first made using social media.

National organizations such as the National Network to End Domestic Violence, have taken the lead in providing guidance and support to organizations in understanding and addressing safety issues that have and continue to develop with the role of digital communication in our work and lives.<sup>7</sup> As social media campaigns are one aspect of an organization’s overall strategies, so campaign safety issues will be one piece of an organization’s safety protocol. We recommend that organizations working in prevention of sexual violence adopt clear guidelines for staff in representing the organization in all media, specifically including social media. We recommend that safety guidelines also include protocol for receiving and documenting disclosures made through social media, including as the result of social

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., National Network to End Domestic Violence Safety Net Project, included in Section IX, below.



media campaigns. Because this paper focuses on social marketing campaigns, it does not include a comprehensive discussion or recommendations for safety in all digital communications. We invite our colleagues whose focus includes services to victims and survivors, and criminal justice response, to address those issues in a companion document to this one.

## **VI. Recommendations & Best Practices**

***Recommendations.*** The first recommendation is to align any use of social media with existing organizational or campaign goals. Resources are devoted to build, maintain, and grow social media use with a clear understanding of intended outcomes. Integrating social media into larger goals will supplement and accent larger goals, reach a wider audience, and diversify reach. Similarly, given the dynamic and fast changing nature of social media, policies regarding the use of social media, need to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. This could be done through a calendar reminder, and integrated with other organizational policy review protocols.

The second recommendation is to use social media to form a dynamic relationship with one's intended audience. It is not a productive use of social media to create a group, organizational page, or account and then leave it dormant and/or unmonitored. In order to grow a movement and reach a wider audience, content needs to be updated consistently, and feedback responded to, and integrated into content, as appropriate. Because social media is a two-way road of communication (that is, users can respond to messages and information that your organization or campaign disseminates), its use is most effective when users feel part of the online community being created. Thus, consistent and responsive contact with target audiences is crucial to fueling a campaign's momentum, as is frequent monitoring of progress towards outcomes to consider incremental success, as well as adjustments indicated by audience response.

Use visual content whenever possible. On Facebook, for example, posts with videos or pictures take up more room and are more eye-catching than text alone. For the organization's most important messages, consider placing text over a photo or creating an image to share.

Encourage other organizations to share the campaign content. It is likely that many other agencies serving the same focus audience have a social media presence; showing support for the content of these organizations' campaigns is likely to lead to reciprocal support. Including explicit requests (e.g., "Please share!" "Plz retweet!") can be effective. For particularly important events (e.g., annual awareness days), some organizations develop sample tweets, posts, etc., and email them to partner organizations to use.

It is already a best practice that organizations working on sexual violence prevention make intentional language choices – everything from being careful when using gendered pronouns to staying clear of victim-blaming language so as to avoid alienating survivors. Using intentional language is even more important in social media communications because a message can live forever online, and can often be distorted when oppositional groups are given "open windows" via loosely considered language. Luckily, social media also allows mistakes to be corrected in real-time, and provides additional opportunities to create trusting and transparent relationships with target audiences. Nonetheless, it remains crucial to be conscientious of exactly how a campaign's message may be interpreted by both the target audience(s), as well as unintentional audiences, as most information disseminated via the internet is readily available to the general public.

## **VII. Best Practices From Other Resources**

The CDC (2011) includes twelve main lessons its *Top Lessons Learned from Using Social Media*. They are:

1. Make Strategic Choices and Understand the Level of Effort

2. Go Where the People Are
3. Adopt Low-Risk Tools First
4. Make Sure Messages Are Science-based
5. Create Portable Content
6. Facilitate Viral Information Sharing
7. Encourage Participation
8. Leverage Networks
9. Provide Multiple Formats
10. Consider Mobile Technologies
11. Set Realistic Goals
12. Learn from Metrics and Evaluate Your Efforts

A *Social Media Toolkit*, including more information on these best practices, and social media specific guidelines for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, text messaging, and using widgets and badges can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/>. The *Social Media Toolkit* includes best practices for each type of social media application.

Hughes (2010) includes a similar, albeit more specific, list of best practices, in her white paper on leveraging social media for public health goals<sup>8</sup>. These include:

1. Abide by the “one click” rule whenever possible
2. Develop a constant stream of compelling digital content
3. Enable people to show their involvement in a visible way
4. Collaborate with influencers online

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<sup>8</sup> The full white paper can be viewed at: [http://smexchange.ogilvypr.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/OW\\_SM\\_WhitePaper.pdf](http://smexchange.ogilvypr.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/OW_SM_WhitePaper.pdf)

5. Align efforts with public health providers offline
6. Ensure that transparency and authenticity remain paramount.

### **VIII. Conclusion: Our Best Practices**

Social media and marketing is only permanent in the sense that it is a consistently and permanently evolving communications medium. As such, our recommendations for best practices are meant to be just as malleable and adaptable. Indeed, no campaign that involves social media and marketing as either a supplemental or central component will be effective in the struggle against sexual violence if it is designed such that it only utilizes a stagnant, and therefore temporary, campaign model with regard to its use of the various communication tools currently available. Thus, our *current* prescriptions for best practices are listed below:

1. Develop, implement and follow organizational policy on social media. Use this policy to formulate a strategic plan around social media. Both your social media policy and plan will need to be reviewed and updated on an annual and by-need basis as the social media sphere is fluid and fast changing.
2. Social media campaigns are the most effective when part of a larger approach. Incorporate social media as part of your general planning and as an integral part of your other established practices. See social media as a conduit to valuable face-to-face interactions.
3. Create your own success definitions and metrics that are relevant to and measurable by your program. Define success before you start your social media campaign.
4. Remember that disclosures and reporting do happen via social media. Be sure to have your program or agency establish a policy for addressing disclosures that come through social media outlets before launching your campaign.

Grounding social media use within larger communication goals is essential; this relates to grounding social media tools within communication goals that are offline as well as online. Using networks to facilitate the use of social media tools and spread of messages online and offline is also particularly important.

### IX. Additional Resources

- Berkley Media Studies Group
  - o <http://www.bmsg.org/>
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention Social Media Guidelines
  - o <http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/>
- National Network to End Domestic Violence Safety Net Project
  - o <http://nnedv.org/projects/safetynet.html>
- Media Education Foundation Documentary: Game Over – Gender, Race and Violence in Video Games
  - o <http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=205>
- <http://www.socialmedia.org>
- References for Social Media Safety and Disclosures
  - o *Sexual Violence and Social Media; Building a Framework for Prevention* (see pp. 15-21) Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (2013) <http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/sites/all/files/pdf/reports/sexual-violence-and-social-media.pdf>
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