

Websites and Social Media for Nonprofit Organizations



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Introduction

This report was created to share knowledge gained from a research, design, and website coding sprint for a graduate level college course. I worked with a class team to learn what a nonprofit organization needs for a total online presence. Fellow student Brandy Sander contributed to the socail media aggregator research here. In the course of the research, I found many specific details from academic studies and published subject matter experts that can help all nonprofit organizations. I went on to do further research on available ways to publish a website and the costs of products to help an organization manage multiple social media accounts with one tool.

The average person can be a great volunteer, activist, or social justice advocate. It seems to be difficult to also expect volunteers to also train themselves to become a rapid expert on using online media. I wish to help others who read this report gain key knowledge quickly rather than trying to go through endless amounts of content to educate themselves. The focus of this report is how to get started with an online presence or improve the online presence for a nonprofit group. It is my hope that this information will be used to make the world a more fair, compassionate, and caring place to live.

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Literature Review Overview

One of the first beneficial steps a new non-profit organization can take to aid communications about its purpose and programs is to establish a website (Waters, 2007). A difference in website content has been found based on the size of the organization; larger non-profits will have annual reports, mission statements, and organizational goals available on their websites, while smaller nonprofits use a sales approach and eCommerce technologies to collect needed funds from donors (Waters, 2007). Having a website gives an organization credibility but it is a poor medium for two-way communication with donors and supporters due to non-profits often lacking the technical expertise needed to make complex websites (Kenix, 2008). Four key factors from past design principles when designing non-profit websites have been developed regarding engagement. The first is to represent the organization's mission and how that aligns with their values and goals, the second principle is to give access to specialized information or resources that people may not get elsewhere unless on the website, the third is to showcase a community of people that depict what the organization's purpose, and lastly the website should share with the public a simple way to join and/or donate to the organization (Knapp et al, 2019).

However, most platforms as well as users are not necessarily focusing on websites anymore. As articles in the Literature Review become more recent, the idea of using social media to drive people to a website is outdated. A website is useful to be an online presence sharing information about an organization while social media is now the more important venue to engage with the public. Social media platforms have the infrastructure for a non-profit to easily share updates, communicate with an audience, publish calls to action, and they are free to use (Lovejoy, 2012). The nature of social media being diverse and decentralized can greatly benefit the messaging strategy of a non-profit as people can share content with friends, find posts that go viral, people can interact with the organization's published content, and organizations can issue calls to mobilize (Guo, 2014).

Organizations can use the "micro-blogging" publishing features of social media to share information and updates, carry out dialogue and interactions with people, and request specific actions like buying t-shirts or making direct donations (Lovejoy, 2012). As non-profit organizations have pivoted to using social media for a majority of their online communications, the number of non-profit messages on social media platforms has gone up dramatically and a communication strategy is needed to reach an audience in a "noisy" environment (Guo, 2018). The size of an organization's following, how often content is posted, and how much the organization interacts with others on the platform impact how much attention their social media account receives (Guo, 2018). Social media platforms have become more specialized

with an increase in variety and an organization will often have multiple accounts which can be managed through a social media aggregator tool to save time by removing the need to interact with many separate accounts (Zignani et al, 2016).

Best Practices for a Website

The following best practices for a nonprofit organization were discovered during a Literature Review from the References in this report.

- A website is still needed to help identify an organization and a social media presence by itself is not a substitute for having a website (Hoefer and Twis, 2018).
- Portraits and/or profiles of the volunteers foster a sense of esteem and belonging known as “organizational identification (OID)” (Knapp et al, 2019).
- Indicate how donations are to be used by the nonprofit to meet the public’s need for accountability for funds to be used responsibly and need for transparency to avoid fears of fraud or misuse of funds (Waters, 2007), (Hoefer and Twis, 2018).
- Donations will only be collected through a secure online service to protect the privacy and financial information of donors (Waters, 2007).
- A toll-free phone number and physical mailing address is beneficial for donors that are not comfortable with online payment systems (Waters, 2007).
- Links to information sources published on other websites can be helpful (Waters, 2007).
- “Nonprofits should consider putting in place a clear process for moving the potential stakeholder from someone who “stopped by” the website to someone who provides monetary resources, participates in mission-driven activities, and proffers moral support to clients, staff members, and the organization itself” (Hoefer and Twis, 2018).
- Donors and sponsors can be thanked by publishing their names on the website, by a timely email response, or mailed letter (Waters, 2007).
- Keep an online donation process separate from any online shopping so donors know they are making an altruistic gift to the nonprofit and not a purchase; do not use eCommerce terms for donations such as shopping cart, checkout, or purchase (Waters,

2007).

- A website usually lacks enough interactive content to attract people to visit it repeatedly; having media to consume is what attracts repeated engagement; the website should have access to consumable media available via links to social media feeds (Hoefer and Twis, 2018).



Website Publishing Product Comparison

The following chart compares prices and some liabilities of six major website publishing products.

PLATFORM	COST	RISKS / LIABILITIES
Blogger	Free to use but permanent embedded advertising through Google AdSense	Google owns copyright on published content and can delete all of it without warning; not a flexible website platform as much as just a blogging tool; 3 rd party domain name registration is still needed
Squarespace	Plans are \$18 - \$40	A website HTML cannot be ported, only an XML file; CSS is withheld as propriety so customers cannot migrate their site to a competitor
WebFlow	Plans are \$29 a month and higher	Deceptive practice: the platform lets you build a website for free, funnels you to different plans for monthly payments; Webflow uses Bootstrap code in a GUI, so they are selling people free, open-source code via their visual interface
Weebly	\$6 to \$26 a month, \$50 and up for annual domain name registration	Deceptive practice: the platform advertises the cost of Annual Plan per month but the actual monthly subscription is a 30% higher rate
Wix	\$14 to \$39 a month	Does not disclose the cost of annual domain name registration or if there are costs for add-ons / widgets for a website
WordPress	Complete lack of marketing transparency with an unlimited array of Wordpress themes, third party built themes, and add-ons / widgets such as online stores and analytics tools	Any free / personal use site that uploads a Privacy Policy is blocked and forced to migrate to a paid plan without prior warning; added free to customize the URL of a domain name is not disclosed; designs of website themes can be very limited and bounded so it is hard to determine in advance how flexible a theme when trying to customize its design

The best option for the nonprofit startup served by my class project was to hand code the website as we were volunteers charging nothing to do this. I recommended to host the website with 1&1 IONOS (<https://www.ionos.com/>) whose Basic Web Host package for \$4 a month has a highly competitive price. It is in the interest of the organization to try and find a skilled coder to help out or hire one for a competitive rate in order to save money on website publishing over the course of time. Of the visual design products, Wordpress is the most commonly used publisher for the nonprofits studied in the course of my class project.

The client opted for the \$2 a month email package to have an email address that matched the domain name of the website (such as info@nonprofit.org). I recommend buying this service to keep the personal contact information of volunteers from being harvested online. The email address can be forwarded to any account you like without giving that email address away to strangers. IONOS has an aggressive anti-spam feature to their email and in over 2 years of service I have not gotten a single Spam email.

Be aware that bad actors routinely pull data on recently published websites searching for phone numbers and other data. They will send scam and phishing emails, like offers for fixing anything broken or Search Engine Optimization (SEO) needs to reach people, which can often appear to be helpful or even from the website host. Ignore any unwanted solicitations regarding your website. You may see a few when a new website is published.

Another important discovery was that “too many cooks can ruin the soup.” I saw repeated instances on the Wordpress sites of different organizations where volunteers had broken the design the of the website. Pages had missing content or were blank, the same content was repeated on multiple pages, contact information was missing or out of date, and at least on blog was abandoned in 2019. It had the look of volunteers breaking the website. I recommend making sure any volunteer handling website publishing has the knowledge and experience on how to handle the medium. If not, they need the time to learn about website publishing.

Best Practices for Social Media

The phrase “social media strategy” is used frequently. The concept comes from business and MBA authors publishing content for profit. Our team learned that there is no “A-to-Z” recipe for social media success. Social media success for a nonprofit stems more from consistent publishing to the platforms you use and following these best practices:

- Public supporters “engagement can be understood as having both an interest in the mission and goals of the nonprofit, and a “task-related state of mind” for donating and volunteering to the nonprofit of choice” (Hoefer and Twis, 2018).
- Communicate with supporters to learn what their interests are related to the organization (Waters, 2007).
- Share different kinds of content from informational updates, asking questions of followers, asking for actions to be taken (Lovejoy, 2012).
- A benefit of using social media is being able to define the organization and communicate directly with the public without interference from any other entity like a news organization (Kenix, 2008).
- Having a social media strategy is important to find people and keep them engaged (Hoefer and Twis, 2018).
- Treat social media contacts as friends (Kanter and Fine, 2010).
- Treat all social media friends as equally valuable (Kanter and Fine, 2010).
- Make posts that are authentic and connect to others in real, human ways; never have fake posts, purchased or fake followers, or faked comments (Kanter and Fine, 2010).
- Ask related organizations and causes for mentions and followers (Waters, 2007).
- Post “karma banking content” which shares information with your followers, celebrates others’ achievements, and expresses thanks to people “often and loudly for their efforts. The highest compliment that a good karma banker can receive is “You’re a great sharer.” Being generous with others has a “boomerang effect” and encourages them to

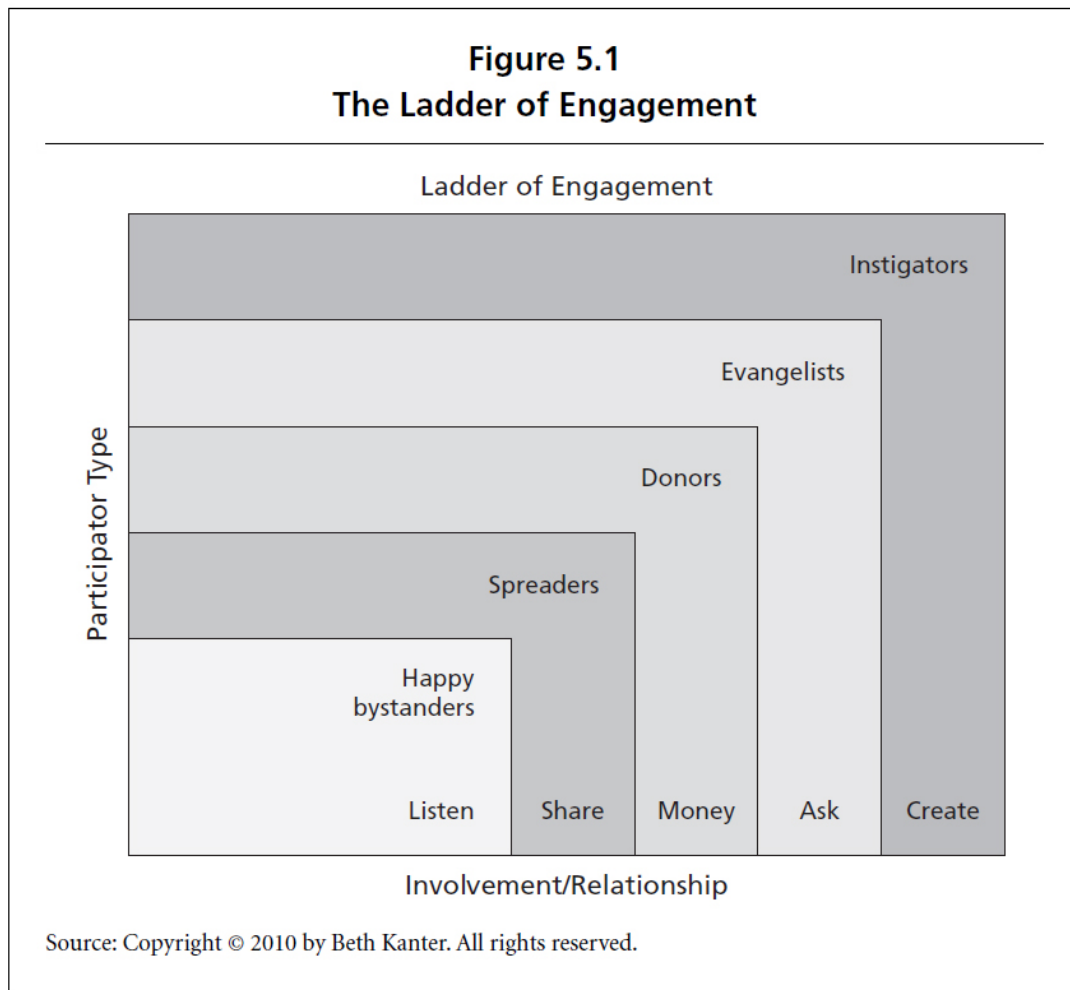
be generous to you in return (Kanter and Fine, 2010).

- No effort is too small to be considered useless as they can add up and have ripple effects (Aaker et al, 2010).
- Emotional contagion ripples through social networks, and it's important to understand how the contagion of positive emotions can lead others to help” (Aaker et al, 2010).
- “Some people are Facebook people. Some are Twitter people. Some go to portal sites. The fact is, each person has his or her own media preferences. Therefore, it helps to mix up the media that you use and coordinate your efforts to drive people to the social media that enable them to act” (Aaker et al, 2010).
- Tell a short, interesting story that makes people curious to learn more (Aaker et al, 2010).
- Learn how to guide people with specific instructions on how to take meaningful action after getting their attention and engaging with them (Aaker et al, 2010).
- Learn how to make requests compelling (Aaker et al, 2010).

Ladder of Engagement Infographic for social media followers:

- Social media supporters can be viewed as being on a “Ladder of Engagement” [see figure 5.1] and can move from differing levels of support at different times based on what they are able to contribute to a nonprofit; supporters move around the ladder in no particular order at various times jumping from one rung to another based on what they are able to contribute at a given time (Kanter and Fine, 2010).

Ladder of Engagement: Figure 5.1



Recommended Social Media Books

These three books are written by subject matter experts who have completed a lot of academic research and are recommended to benefit your organization.

1) ***101 Social Media Tactics for Nonprofits: A Field Guide*** by Mathos and Norman (2012)

This textbook has many ways an organization can engage the public on social media.

2) ***The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change*** by Aaker et al (2010)

This textbook was written by an instructor and her team from the Stanford Graduate School of business and has supported information on its official website at <http://dragonflyeffect.com/blog/> which you can access from any device that can go online.

3) ***The Networked Nonprofit: Connecting With Social Media to Drive Change*** by Kanter and Fine (2010)

This textbook was written by two researchers that are subject matter experts in the domain of nonprofits using social media.

Social Media Aggregator Products

This section outlines social media aggregation strategies for nonprofit organizations. Defining goals, improving content, and making use of available tools in order to expand audience engagement and ensure your organization's voice is heard online are also covered.

People that link to a social media account or share a nonprofit's post are more likely to donate, volunteer, or take part in an event (Saxton and Wang, 2013). There are many key statistics that illustrate success for nonprofit social media strategies (Das, 2010). Some of the main social media metrics that could impact your nonprofit's success are the number of followers for your account, the amount of engagement (such as comments, likes, shares, upvotes, retweets, pins, etc.), and mentions by other people or organizations. According to Nonprofits Source, "55% of people who engage with nonprofits on social media end up taking some sort of action" (Firch, 2018). These nonprofit social media metrics can translate to increased donations, more supporters, and more brand awareness.

Best practices for Social Media Aggregation follow three engagement goals: 1. Spread information about the organization's purpose and mission; 2. Create a community and involve different stakeholders; and 3. Enable a mobile platform with an emphasis of features like donation and volunteer work (Chao and Guo, 2013).

Getting Started with Aggregators

The main priorities of social media marketers at nonprofits are to fundraise, generate brand awareness, recruit volunteers, and share news. Nonprofits use social media aggregation to facilitate sharing news, brand recognition, education about their cause and mission, fundraising, volunteer recruitment, donor recognition, and employee recruitment (Reczek, 2018). The best nonprofit social media strategy is the one that meshes seamlessly with a nonprofit's brand, goals, and the sort of content an audience will find interesting, engaging, and shareable (Chao, Guo 2013).

- Who are you trying to engage?
- Why are you engaging with the public?
- What specific causes or events are you seeking to generate awareness?
- How will you reach as many people as possible?
- Would you contact politicians and/or decision makers in the area?
- What tools are at your disposal?
- Will you have an employee or dedicated volunteer updating these communication platforms?

- Will your organization have a social media and analytics budget?
- What type of content is available to you that will be used to post?

Using Content for Follower Engagement

Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and other social media sites have introduced new convening platforms for organizations to cross-post content to facilitate relationship building and stakeholder engagement. Social media helps organizations engage present and potential stakeholders by sharing, cooperating, and mobilizing joint actions in near-real time (Golbeck et al, 2010; Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009).

Using different platforms and types of media are best practices for increasing and invoking engagement through social media. A mix of different types of content, both in-house and outside “shared” content, with graphics, links, and hashtags have higher engagement rates than those that do not have them (Hou and Lampe, 2015). Posting interactive content can potentially encourage people similar to a target audience to read and watch. This will enhance the engagement rates and drive more traffic towards the website. News articles, graphics, links, videos, photos, and original content have been proven to be key content types to fulfill the goal of engagement. This is because it allows for the organization to showcase themselves with the use of colorful branding, and different attention-grabbing imagery pertaining to the organization. Multimedia is crucial in captivating people within a website for nonprofits. (Hou and Lampe, 2015).

Hashtags can help an organization maximize a post by making the topic more discoverable, which can have a positive effect on non-profit organizations, by increasing followers, donations, and spreading awareness. During our research, it was discovered that there are three different types of hashtag strategies used to make non-profit organizations have successful engagement (Siehl, 2020). One of those being to provide incentive to users with a chosen hashtag. For example, using a post to allow potential audience users to win a free horse-riding lesson if they share this post to their Instagram story (Siehl, 2020). Another method is just using hashtags to identify content in a post can increase visibility by making content discoverable through Google search results if someone searches for that hashtag.

- Tweets with hashtags (no more than two) increase engagement by 200% and are 55% more likely to be retweeted (Siehl, 2020).
- Facebook posts with one or two hashtags see higher engagement (Siehl, 2020).
- Using hashtags on Instagram (no more than 11) increases engagement overall by 12.6% (Ibele, 2018).

Facebook as a Useful Platform

According to Hootsuite author Katie Siehl, 2.5 billion users log into Facebook every month, making it a convincing choice for nonprofits. Facebook has created features specifically pertaining to nonprofits. Those features include donating buttons, pledge match donations, fundraising tools, and donation reporting. Also, fund-raising emphasis is on video content, especially live streaming. This has made Facebook a prominent platform needed in social media aggregation (Siehl, 2020). Facebook has sent more website referral traffic to organizations than any other social media channel (Siehl, 2020).

Aggregator Product Comparisons

Having a single tool to easily manage and monitor all social media accounts can help increase productivity within a given non-profit. It helps an organization to actually focus on their cause rather than spend time managing multiple social media accounts. Aggregation tools create a consistent and cohesive space to help plan and schedule different types of content throughout all of the chosen platforms. Georgetown University found that organizations who consistently promote their brands experience a 23% increase in revenue (Das, 2010).

A social media aggregation tool can help you manage all interactions and conversations as well as help your organization follow hashtags and important topics. When doing research, it was evident that small organizations do not necessarily understand and evaluate the success of their social media performance. Small non-profits can have a lack of awareness and information regarding their social media audiences and whether social media can foster long-term, productive relationships with those audiences (Hou and Lampe, 2015).

Measuring improvement with analytics provided in aggregation tools can help the organization see what areas of their social media accounts are improving engagement. To explain, analytics can show which posts are performing the best, at what times is the audience most engaged, and what kind of content is improving a social media strategy. The competitive analysis below shows and compares the important features needed in an aggregation tool for a non-profit organization. Common aggregatory features are mobile capability, direct video upload, a “best time” automation feature that shows the organization at which times they are having the best engagement on their content, analytic reports to keep track of viewer engagement increases, curation of information, and an overall management feature. There are a variety of social media aggregators on the market. This comparison chart shows how different products have an array of features and capabilities.

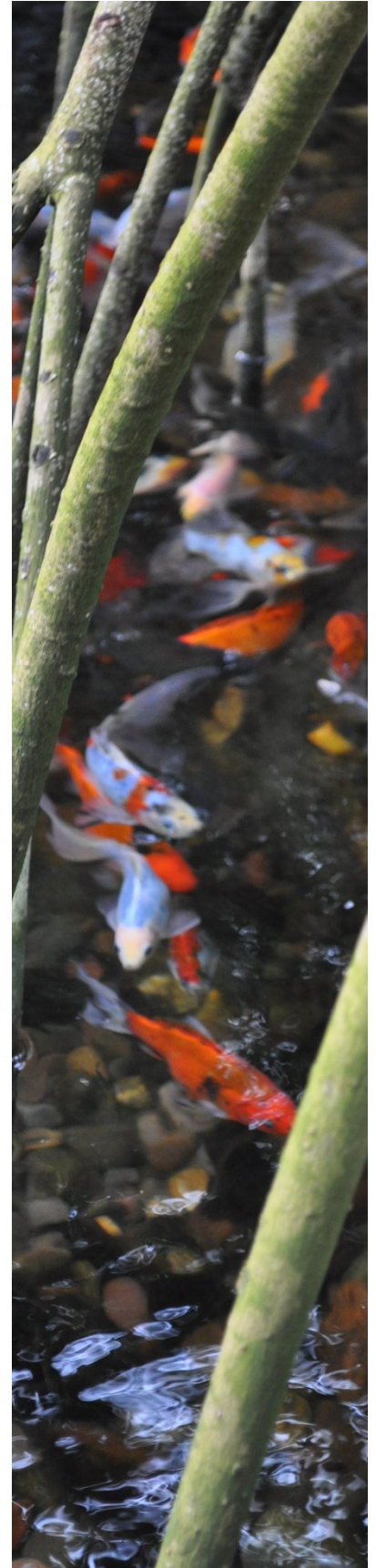
Aggregator Product Comparison Chart

Tool	Free Version	Free Trial	Replies?	Basic Plan Cost	Features
Agora Pulse	No	Yes	Yes	\$79 / month	no credit card needed for free trial, how long not shown
Buffer	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$15 / month	free 3 accounts; basic is 8 accounts
Curator	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$25 / month	free has 3 feeds; basic pro is 5 feeds
eClincher	No	Yes	Yes	\$59 / month	basic 10 feeds; does not say details of free trial
EveryPost	Yes	Yes	No	\$9.99 / month	free 3 accounts; pro is 10 accounts
Falcon	No	Yes	Yes	\$129 / month	must contact Falcon to get Demo
Hey Orca	No	Yes	No	\$84 / month	calendar tool only
Hootsuite	No	Yes	Yes	\$49 / month	30 day free trial; basic 10 accounts, unlimited posts
Later	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$12.50 / month	Free social set; comments on paid version (Fb,IG, Tw, Pin); billed yearly
Meet Edgar	No	Yes	No	\$19 / month	basic 3 accounts; basic \$49/mo 25 accounts
Social Pilot	No	Yes	No	\$25.50 / month	pro 50 accounts, 3 users; 14 day free trial; replies FB only!
Social Oomph	No	Yes	No	\$25 / month	10 accounts + 5 blogs; free trial 1 account only
Sprout Social	No	Yes	Yes	\$99 / month	basic 5 accounts; free trial is 30 days

Recommended Aggregator Products

Our team focused on three main features to consider a social aggregator as beneficial tools for Pegasus Polo Project to start using. We narrowed the field of products to three different options that all have a free version of the product available. Social media calendar style management tools and mass publishing tools that do not allow the user to read and respond to comments were ruled out as our research repeatedly shows the value of engagement with people as being essential for promoting a nonprofit organization online. Pegasus Polo Project should sample these tools to see if there is a preference in the one they wish to use and to gain experience using social media aggregators at no cost to the organization.

- ▶ **Curator** which has a free plan to aggregate three social media feeds and allows for replies to comments and promises to be “free forever” for their basic version. The basic paid pro version of Curator allows the user up to five social media feeds for \$25 / month. It works for any social media platform. Curator has analytics and reporting features. <https://curator.io/>
- ▶ **Buffer** has a free plan that allows three social media accounts and 10 scheduled posts per month. The basic pro version increases to eight social media accounts and 100 scheduled posts per month. Buffer posts to Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Buffer does not require a credit card to start a free account. <https://buffer.com/>
- ▶ **Later** covers one “social media set” which include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest for free. The free version allows for 30 posts per month for one user. The basic pro version doubles the number of posts to 60 per month for one user and can expand the social media platforms being used for \$12.50 a month which is billed yearly. The basic paid pro can add other social media feeds, a calendar view of the app, and analytics. <https://later.com/>



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