Strategic Use of IT

In Youth Engagement for Global Citizenship

Acknowledgements

For additional information, contact:

Organizational Development team
Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC)
1 Nicholas Street, Suite 300, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B7
613-241-7007 • info@ccic.ca • www.ccic.ca

Strategic Use of IT in Youth Engagement for Global Citizenship.
Also published in French as: L'utilisation stratégique des TIC en engagement jeunesse pour une citoyenneté mondiale

TABLE OF CONTENT

I. THE STRATEGIC USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Information technologies (IT) are becoming essential components of public engagement strategies, especially when youth are concerned. Young people are among the most frequent users of information technologies. Most of them have turned away from the mass media and primarily look to the Internet or alternative sources for their information[1] and many of them benefit from virtual spaces to socialize. For these and other reasons, civil society organizations (CSO) in Canada need to begin thinking more seriously about the use of IT to engage youth in issues of human rights, global poverty, and social and environmental justice.

The success of TakingITGlobal, an online, international platform used by over 180,000 young people from 260 countries illustrates both the potential of IT to reach young people and the demand for these kinds of initiatives as a means of finding information, talking together and engaging. Although it would be misguided to assume that everyone under the age of 30 is a technological whiz, youth interest in new technologies is beyond doubt.

The member organizations of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC)[2] acknowledge the importance of exploring the options offered by IT in relation to public engagement. It might be true that youth use Facebook and MySpace but does that mean that CSOs should jump on the bandwagon? Or should practitioners learn about what makes these networks successful and use IT more strategically in our youth engagement efforts and, by doing so, respond to their expectations? This article is intended as a resource to help stakeholders involved in youth engagement explore these questions, develop an effective strategy and select the right technologies for achieving their objectives.

1. YOUTH EXPECTATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Young people are not a one-dimensional entity. Their diversity cannot be overlooked. However, an overview of the literature on youth engagement reveals a few of their common expectations in relation to engagement. First of all, they want to socialize and be with friends. They want networks that make it easy for them to join in.[3] Moreover, some youth claim that they might consider getting involved if they were approached in a personalized way.[4]

Their motivation also relates to their interest in learning or developing skills and the need to improve their employability. For them, social engagement is a means of exploring their strengths. Young people engage, but in return, they expect opportunities for personal, social and work-related growth.[5] They want to play a meaningful role and take on new responsibilities, rather than do menial tasks "for a good cause."

Of course, youth do join movements or organizations because they care about the issues and values being championed. However, they sometimes have difficulty to identify with the approaches used by some organizations, especially if governance structures seem restrictive.[6] They want to be considered full partners in initiatives.[7] In other words, they

---

[1] MacKinnon, Mary Pat; Sonia Pitre, and Judy Watling, *Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, October 2007, available at http://www.cprn.org.

[2] The Canadian Council for International Co-operation is a coalition of Canadian voluntary sector organizations working globally to achieve sustainable human development. CCIC seeks to end global poverty, and to promote social justice and human dignity for all.

[3] Raynes-Goldie, Kate and Luke Walker. "Our Space: Online Civic Engagement Tools for Youth". *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youh.* Edited by W. Lance Bennett, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2008. Pages 161–188

[4] Barnard, Robert, Denise Andrea Campbell and Shelley Smith, *Citizen Re:Generation - Understanding Active Citizen Engagement Among Canada's Information Age Generations*, D-Code, 2003, available at http://www.d-code.com

[5] Thibault, André ; Patrice Albertus and Julie Fortier, *Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, August 2007, available at http://www.cprn.org.

[6] Thibault, André ; Patrice Albertus and Julie Fortier, *Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, August 2007, available at http://www.cprn.org.

[7] Apathy is Boring, *Youth friendly guide to intergenerational decision making*, 2004, available at http://www.youthfriendly.com.

want to be consulted and to participate at every stage, from identifying objectives to developing and implementing strategies and activities.

The participatory reflex of young people has grown with their increasingly frequent use of new information and communication technologies.[8] Taking the interactive capabilities of these technologies as our cue, we should perhaps rethink our strategies in order to meet the expectations of young people and generate longer-lasting, meaningful engagement.

2. IT for Youth Engagement

Internet technologies offer many opportunities for dialogue and interaction. The more familiar they become with these forms of involvement, the more young people - and the general public - have come to appreciate them. Youth want opportunities to become more actively involved in campaigns.[9] Whether by allowing users to contribute to developing information, sharing ideas with other users or simply stating their opinion through a survey, IT encourages thought and generates new knowledge. This thought-based involvement can help young people realize their ability to influence society and therefore, engage over the long term.[10]

For members of civil society involved in public engagement, the challenge is to find creative ways to use IT that make young people see themselves as forces for social change. Could we capitalize on their skill with social networking sites and hand over control to them in promoting CSO activities? Should we create video and radio production workshops to give them training opportunities while exploring social issues? Or should we use networking technologies to support group efforts to find solutions to genuine development issues? Information technologies may open many roads leading to engagement but their various forms are worth exploring before deciding which are best suited to the objectives and resources of organizations and the expectations of young people.

3. A few examples of IT use

Above and beyond Web 1.0 and static sites, new information and communication technologies are tools for engaging the public online and off-line. These technologies can be used to interest young people in many aspects of NGO work and later, to support their own initiatives. Below are various examples of IT grouped according to the function they can serve (For an explanation of the technologies mentioned, refer to the Glossary.)

a) Publishing information

Engaging the public is first and foremost a matter of relating public awareness about social issues to inspired action (or vice versa!). To achieve this requires producing and disseminating relevant and multi-faceted information. Online publication is especially useful considering that young people primarily get their information from the Web or other alternative information sources.[11] Apart from the possible savings in printing cost and the immediate access to timely information, IT encourages public collaboration in developing information.

In the era of Web 2.0, information production is no longer the exclusive domain of organizational staff. Anyone who supports a cause may now contribute to producing information through blogs, wikis, video sharing sites

---

[8] Barnard, Robert, Denise Andrea Campbell and Shelley Smith, *Citizen Re:Generation - Understanding Active Citizen Engagement Among Canada's Information Age Generations*, D-Code, 2003, available at http://www.d-code.com.

[9] Jillaine Smith, Martin Kearns and Allison Fine, *Power to the edges: Trends and Opportunities in Online Civic Engagement*, 2005, available at http://www.pacefunders.org.

[10] Derek Tannis, « Reaching the "Nexters": Youth Participation and the Strategic Application of Technology in the Non-Profit Sector», 2005, available at http://www.usask.ca

[11] MacKinnon, Mary Pat; Sonia Pitre, and Judy Watling, *Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, October 2007, available at http://www.cprn.org.

and other forms of social media. It therefore offers them an opportunity to share their ideas and actions, to enlist the media and political decision makers, and in turn become forces of public engagement. The blog developed by the Canadian youth delegation for the Bali summit is an excellent example of an initiative that managed to generate interest and engagement among young people on climate change issues.

b) Communicating with supporters

Naturally, IT influences the means used to communicate with an organization's members and supporters. It is now possible to reach a large number of people quickly and at little cost via email, text messaging or social networking sites. One example that immediately comes to mind is the electronic newsletter, already a classic, that helps promote activities, campaigns and fundraising efforts. Based in Montreal, Club 2/3 was able to adapt and enliven its newsletter for a young audience by creating les Échos C2T. Viral dissemination of email messages also expands their potential reach. For Canada World Youth, this avenue was explored during a viral recruitment campaign for exchange programs. The strategy was used to reach a targeted population while taking advantage of the word-of-mouth phenomenon.

IT also fosters consultation and feedback. By asking the public to respond to initiatives - or communicate its own - we can expand the depth of public engagement while measuring the impact of efforts made. For example, Fair Trade Manitoba generated active public involvement in its One-Month Challenge through a weekly electronic survey which also helped to evaluate the impact of their campaign.

c) Mobilizing and facilitating action

IT is playing an increasingly important role in organizing group action and engaging popular support. Occasional calls for action sent by email are one example of a strategy effective with young people. By calling on their participation at specific times in response to specific circumstances participants can assess the impact of their involvement and gain a sense of belonging to a movement. Signing online petitions and cards can also lead to long-term engagement. By asking the public to sign an online statement for its campaign in support of universal access to public services, Oxfam Canada is able to obtain contact information for those who participated. This makes it possible to develop a long-term relationship by sending out calls to action.

Wireless telephone and text messaging are also used more and more often for engagement purposes. Check Your Head in Vancouver experimented with this technology during one initiative designed to encourage youth to vote. Short texts containing information and invitations to certain election campaign-related events strengthened interest among participants in the democratic process.

d) Collaboration

In a recent compilation of good practices in youth engagement,[12] Amnesty International raised an important point: youth are extremely busy! Between school, work, recreation and family, it can sometimes be difficult for them to find the time to become engaged. Networked technologies facilitate meeting planning and task coordination, and offer new opportunities for collaborating by overcoming the obstacles of distance, time and schedules. It can even lead to online volunteering. This approach was adopted by some organizations, as illustrated in a report available at Techsoup.org.

IT can be used to break down the walls of isolation and creates ties among marginalized sharing similar experiences, and provide them with the support and encouragement they need to take action against injustices

---

[12] Amnesty International. *Youth – Activism – Engagement – Participation: Good practices and essential strategies for impact.* 2006. Available at http://rights.amnesty.org.

they encounter in their lives and in the world around them. It also helps build bridges between highly divergent realities: interaction and discussion using IT can be a first step toward creating a sense of solidarity with global issues. Sharing personal stories is an effective method for stimulating social engagement. For example, Change for Children, based in Alberta, used video conferencing to put young Canadians in touch with young people in Nicaragua. Their event, Video Conference for Hope, aimed to raise funds to build a school and also helped students reflect as a group on the value of education.

e) Training and research

An overview of how IT is used for education and development[13] shows how technology can enable young people to develop solutions to real issues. This form of education geared to problem-solving seems to foster behavioural changes, and therefore lasting engagement. Voluntary Service Overseas Canada uses an online environment created with Moodle, a course management system, to provide its volunteers with support and training for the duration of their projects and during their time overseas. The development of webinars also provides a live channel for training unhindered by distance, without sacrificing the interactive aspects that foster thought and discussion.

IT also enables collaboration and learning in relation to international-level research. Some innovative projects have used simple but reliable technologies to offer stimulating opportunities for young people to become engaged and gain experience. This was true of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) which used discussion lists, forums and Skype, an Internet telephony software, to enable young researchers to develop policies related to the information society and the environment[14]. However, the collaborative potential of IT often remains underused.

4. Toward an effective strategy

Information Technology (IT) can be very effective in engaging the public, however, like any technology, it is just a tool. Rather than merely following the latest online trends, organizations should adopt a strategy for engagement where the process of engagement is equally important as the final outcomes. Here are a few simple steps to follow to ensure that a good strategy is in place.

■ Set clear objectives

Set clear objectives for engagement. Is the aim to change popular beliefs and attitudes, influence practices, or guide social policy? The objectives and the means of achieving them depend on the organization's theory of social change. Does change happen because the "awareness" of a large number of youth is raised or because a smaller number are active and committed? It is vital to have clear objectives in mind from the outset in order to select the appropriate initiatives and technological vehicles to realize them.

■ Getting the right actors to interact and collaborate

Ideally, when an organization decides to use IT to reach youth, the focus should be on interaction and collaboration. Connections are made between people, not computers and other electronic gadgets. It is therefore essential to involve the right actors, i.e. youth.[15] By consulting and involving them in developing and implementing projects, the chances of choosing the right means and the best tools for reaching the targeted audience are improved.

---

[13] Paas, Leslie and Heather Creech. *How Information and Communications Technologies Can Support Education for Sustainable Development: Current uses and trends. International Institute for Sustainable Development*. IISD. 2008.

[14] Dongtotsang, Dolma; Maja Andjelkovic and Terri Willard. *Engaging Young People in the Policy Change Process. Lessons from the Information Society and Sustainable Development: Next Generation Policy Directions Project*. IISD. May 2006.

[15] Jillaine Smith, Martin Kearns et Allison Fine, *Power to the edges: Trends and Opportunities in Online Civic Engagement*, 2005. Available at http://www.pacefunders.org.

■ ASSESS THE RESOURCES NEEDED

The engagement strategy must also be based on available resources. A strategy using IT can be extremely expensive, both in terms of human and financial resources. It is important to plan carefully and ensure that the necessary resources are available to see the strategy through to completion after the initial investment in technology is made.

■ PROMOTE

Obviously, getting the word out is critical to the success of any engagement strategy. But very often, the initiators of online projects assume that all they need to do is develop a discussion space and users will flock to it. This is not the case: Target audiences must be identified, located and motivated.

■ ASSESS IMPACT AND MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation helps to ensure that necessary adjustments are made to ensure full youth engagement. An advantage of IT-based initiatives is that online monitoring of participation is made easy. Participation in online forums, polls and video sharing, for example, is immediately evident. By incorporating evaluation into the design of an initiative, it is easier to assess the degree to which your objectives have been reached.

RESOURCES:

- Evaluating the Impact of Information Technology : Focus on theories of change, training, and clear purpose in acquiring technology.

- Does Your Reach Exceed Your Grasp? Transitioning into programmatic uses of technology: Explores ways nonprofits budget for and use technology to meet organizational goals.

- Planning Projects for a Shoestring: Outlines how organizations can define needs, understand resource limitations, and plan accordingly.

- Good Advice on Technology Planning: Tips for planning and implementing projects.

- Bringing your social media project to life: engagement planning: Elements to include in a good engagement plan using the Web 2.0.

II. A FEW FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING AN IT STRATEGY

To develop an effective youth engagement strategy, it is vital to set clear objectives and account for the expectations and realities of the young people targeted, and to ensure that the initiatives are consistent with available resources. After consulting organizations that have already experimented with IT, we now know a few other factors that can contribute to the success of technology-based initiatives.

1. KEEP A YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE

Merely choosing certain technologies over others can give youth engagement initiatives a more youthful appearance. However, the medium is not entirely the message. To engage young people, the power of image should not be underestimated. This calls into play the concept of branding: In its compilation of best practices in youth engagement, Amnesty International mentions the importance of developing an organizational image attractive to youth. For Amnesty International UK, this involved adopting new slogans, using livelier colours and most of all, sending a message that promotes the organization's humanitarian values over intellectual arguments.[16]

Attracting the attention of youth demands focussing on the things that interest them. Some issues are already extremely popular among youth. Environmental issues are an example, which partly explains the success of initiatives like It's getting hot in here, a blog on climate change. Other organizations with no specific youth strategy also manage to generate significant support among the under 25-year age group due to the attractiveness of their issue. However, this does not mean that an organization should drop its cause for a sexier one! Apathy is Boring has taken up the task of rallying the most disengaged youth around an issue they usually perceive as extremely dull: politics! By reconciling political issues with other interests among young people (music, arts and technology), the organization is stimulating their involvement in the democratic process. Their Web site plays a major role in this mission.

2. REACH OUT TO YOUTH (ONLINE)

Youth get most of their information from the Web and other alternative sources. They are among the most frequent users of information technologies. IT therefore constitutes an attractive avenue for reaching a large number of them. However, simply posting information online is not enough to expand the scope of engagement. The Web is vast, and rather than merely hope that people will chance upon their sites, organizations must reach out and approach them in the places they visit.

Where do youth hang-out in the cyber world? Email inboxes are always a good starting point for keeping in touch with supporters. An effective email strategy can generate sustained engagement provided that recipients are not flooded with messages that increasingly resemble spam. For that reason, the Make Poverty History campaign strives to sustain interest by adapting the content and frequency of its emails to circumstances and to its supporters' geographic location.

How can organizations reach new audiences that are not yet signed-up for newsletters or updates? A study of sites with a focus on civic engagement such as TakingITGlobal suggests that they are fostering sustained engagement among young people who already have a keen civic conscience. [17] For these youth, the Internet is a source of information and a medium for meeting people who share similar interests. These civic engagement sites are like cyber-crossroads that can be used to create alliances with organizations that support similar values and to increase traffic on their respective sites.

---

[16] Amnesty International. *Youth – Activism – Engagement – Participation: Good practices and essential strategies for impact*. 2006. Available at http://rights.amnesty.org.

[17] Raynes-Goldie, Kate and Luke Walker. "Our Space: Online Civic Engagement Tools for Youth". *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. Edited by W. Lance Bennett, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2008. Pages 161–188

However, these specialized sites are not very effective in reaching disengaged youth. Generally, Web users tend to seek out information that reflects their interests. Virtual "word-of-mouth" could be an effective tactic for approaching a new public. A study from 2003 reported that 42% of young people engage voluntarily because their friends do, and almost half say they are not engaged because they were not personally approached[18]. While the Internet is at the leading edge of social networking and viral marketing, organizations can use their supporters' networks to reach an exponential number of people, while retaining a personalized approach.

3. REACH OUT TO YOUTH (OFF-LINE)

According to Rachel Dhawan, webmaster for Apathy is Boring, organizing off-line events is important too. For this organization, concerts and artistic events align with the interests of disengaged youth and offer opportunities for discussing democratic issues. Schools and religious communities can be good starting points for contacting young people who are interested but not yet engaged. In an effort to engage Aboriginal youth, TakingITGlobal decided to work with teachers to take advantage of the school connection and training environment for students. By hiring workers from diverse cultural communities, TIG was also able to reach out to young people from diasporas. Technology then becomes a means of stimulating and sustaining their interest by offering them opportunities for discussion, learning new skills, etc.

Face-to-face meetings are also vital to reinforce involvement by people already active online or elsewhere. During its Global Citizens Forum, the Ontario Council for International Cooperation delivered training on using art and technology to engage young people. Participants were later able to expand their engagement by taking charge of organizing activities in their community.

4. ENSURE THAT THE TECHNOLOGY IS NOT EXCLUSIVE

Even today in Canada, the digital divide produces many inequities. People without a home computer, without Internet access or with dial-up rather than a high speed connection have different experiences with IT. People living in rural areas, members of First Nations, newcomers, and persons with little education or low incomes tend to have a more limited access.[19] However, the issue of inclusion extends far beyond issues of access.

A second divide separates young people in terms of how they use new technologies. Young people form a heterogeneous group and differences emerge in their relationship to technology. They have different knowledge, skills and cultures in terms of IT. Studies report that men and women differ in how they use these technologies, with men reporting a higher use of computers for programming, graphic design and gaming[20]. A lack of diversified content, or lack of content adapted to the realities of marginalized groups, may also account for their lack of interest in the Web and network technologies.[21]

Some initiatives highly successful with young people who are already engaged have inadvertently excluded disengaged and marginalized audiences. Similarly, some technologies that we take for granted can become major obstacles to participation by certain groups. For example, a simple online registration form can become a stumbling block for youth whose computing skills are limited.

---

[18] Barnard, Robert, Denise Andrea Campbell and Shelley Smith, *Citizen Re:Generation - Understanding Active Citizen Engagement Among Canada's Information Age Generations*, D-Code, 2003, available at http://www.d-code.com

[19] Dechief, Dianne. *My digitaldivide: Narratives of access inequalities and their significance*, Presentation at R/Évolutions Confernces, March 20, 2005.

[20] Looker, Dianne and Victor Thiessen, The *Digital Divide in Canadian Schools: Factors Affecting Student Access to and use of Information Technology*. Statistics Canada.2002.

[21] Reddick, Andrew; Christian Boucher et Manon Groseilli. *The Dual Digital Divide: The Information Highway in Canada.* Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Ekos Research Associates, December 2000.

The risk of excluding potential participants can be avoided by choosing user-friendly technologies and offering support and training on using technology for social inclusion purposes. In some regions where access to high-speed is making slow inroads, cell phone technology and text messaging may be options worth exploring. It is vital to remember that engagement through technology does not preclude the need for real-world interaction.

5. Take steps to keep the technology lively… and youthful!

Since youth have an instinct to participate, it seems especially appropriate to involve them in online engagement efforts. Many organizational sites are now equipped with participation-style applications, usually forums and blogs. Many had to learn the hard way that creating these kinds of applications is not enough to generate a flood of interest. A brief tour of the forums on CSO sites shows that many contain only a few comments, often posted by the moderators themselves. How can we stimulate participation?

Ideally, forums and other kinds of online communities should have a clearly identified purpose and respond to real needs among the target audience. By having young people help develop the project, and by letting them choose the topics and initiate discussion, we increase the likelihood of seeing genuine interaction occur. Virtual communities that discuss real life issues and are solution-oriented also have a greater chance of survival. The Quantum Shift.TV initiative capitalizes on the concept of social media to pass on inspirational stories and prompt young people to take action. With its contest platform, Quantum Shift.tv also makes good use of the competitive spirit among young people to motivate their involvement. Contests also incite youth to promote the site and its initiatives.

Furthermore, to keep these communities lively requires resources. Youth themselves are human resources not to be overlooked. Power Camp National hired two young women to generate content that would appeal to the users of the site Kickaction, an "online" community of girls and young women concerned about social change. The young employees were able to capture the interest sought because of their similar concerns and ability to "speak the same language." This example of collaboration highlights the importance of genuinely enlisting young people in efforts to secure public engagement, whether as volunteers, trainees or salaried employees.

6. Use resources as effectively as possible

Scarce resources are a major obstacle for many organizations that would like to exploit the potential of IT. Keeping a Web site up to date is the first challenge. To sustain interest in a site demands that its content be constantly refreshed. The use of a RRS feed can be a major help. Such a feed makes it possible to refresh the content of a site by using the latest entries from other sites of common interest. This means capitalizing on existing resources.

One important rule to follow: avoid duplicating other initiatives. To encourage online participation, it is probably more cost-effective to use existing tools rather than create new sites. Social networking sites whether or not they are geared to social change already offer a place for interacting and sharing. Their functional capabilities can be used to engage young people on their terms. For example, Rethos, a platform centered on social change, uses a Facebook application to mount debates on social issues. Rethos can therefore take advantage of existing traffic on Facebook to promote awareness about the organization and a few of the causes championed by its community.

Social networking sites can also ensure a high profile on the Web despite limited financial and technical resources. Although it may not require a great deal of computer skill, the effort is time-consuming. Creating a page on the latest popular site is only the first step. After that, the task is to build and maintain a network and refresh its content on a regular basis, etc. It is therefore important to focus on the right networks according to the groups targeted. For the regional Atlantic office of Canadian Crossroads International, using Facebook to advance its youth recruitment efforts was a strategic decision; the Coordinator was able to take advantage of existing groups of users in the right age group and with the right qualifications. Creating their own Facebook group also made it easier to promote CCI's events.

7. Carefully monitor the content … or foster dialogue?

An organization is entitled to be concerned over its image and therefore over the content published on its site. A lack of resources for moderating activities is one reason given to explain the reluctance of organizations to set up discussion sites on the Web that encourage public participation. Before immediately excluding the possibility of participatory applications, consider the following argument: it is usually much easier to remove inappropriate comments than to moderate all contributions. Having the participants themselves moderating inappropriate content can become a means of participation and encourage the growth of a virtual community. Visitors can be asked to report inappropriate content and promote the most relevant or interesting contributions by voting, a method used on [YouTube](#).

The concept of monitoring could also be reconsidered. IT is a highly relevant tool for fostering social dialogue and collective reflection. The dialogue generated through a discussion about incorrect or inappropriate content posted on the site can in itself stimulate deeper learning about issues. To do so, however, the idea of control must take second place to fostering the dialogue amongst users.

8. In conclusion …

The use of IT is not a magic formula that can guarantee the success of youth engagement initiatives. First of all, it is vital to ensure that such technologies are used in a manner consistent with the organization's objectives and resources. It is also important to understand the strengths and limitations of each technology and select the right one for the job. Moreover, by consulting and involving young people in these initiatives, we can ensure that their expectations are addressed, their interests represented, and that they, in their turn become agents of social change.

III. INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

1. CWY RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN [back]

As part of its annual 2007-08 recruitment campaign, Canada World Youth (CWY) created a viral marketing campaign to reach as many candidates as possible. The initiative was designed to use the organization's networks as a means of more effectively target potential candidates and guiding them to a micro Web site developed specifically for the recruitment campaign.

The microsite was designed with a young audience in mind, with bright colours, a photo gallery, videos and a link to a simplified online registration form.

A newsletter was sent by email to each member of the CWY network asking them to pass along information about the program. A "send to a friend" function was inserted in the message to facilitate re-distribution. Email was managed using the *Campainer* software to prevent the messages from appearing as spam.

Lessons learned:
The viral aspect could have been used more effectively by:
- Sending out the newsletters earlier in the recruitment campaign;
- Distributing information simultaneously on social networking sites like Facebook or others; and
- Creating the option of sending the email to several people at once.

2. GET YOUR VOTE ON campaign [back]

The Get Your Vote On campaign was designed by Check Your Head and other organizations to encourage young people to vote in the 2004 and 2006 federal elections. Text messaging was used to engage young people aged 18 to 34 and spark their interest in the campaign.

Voters registered on the text messaging network regularly received campaign updates, invitations to events and quizzes with prizes to be won. Communication was not a one-way street: participants could also answer surveys about election issues. The opinions gathered from this activity were forwarded to the media and politicians to influence public debate.

According to Kevin Millsip from Check Your Head, young people who participated in the text-messaging network said that they were better informed and more connected to the election campaign.

Lesson learned:
- People are still reluctant to disclose their cell phone numbers. The use of text messaging to engage the public works better when the campaign also includes a "face-to-face" component.

3. Make Poverty History's E-Campaign [back]

As part of the Make Poverty History campaign, the public is asked to take action on line either by signing a petition or writing to political decision makers. Through these calls to action, Make Poverty History accomplishes two goals at once. First, it rallies the popular support the organization needs to fight poverty in Canada and elsewhere. Second, calls to action are a tool for creating a supporter's list that would secure long-term commitment.

When members of the public act on line, they are asked to enter their names on the list of campaign supporters to receive email bulletins, invitations to local events and future calls to action. Once the organization has the postal code of its supporters, it can send them news or invitations adapted to their geographic location.

Lessons learned:
When people trust organizations enough to disclose their email addresses, they should be used properly. That means:
- Limiting the frequency of emails to avoid overloading the recipients;
- Sending pertinent information presented in an interesting way.

4. Video contest by Quantumshift.tv [back]

The Quantumshift.tv video sharing site has launched a contest for North American schools. The initiative encourages students and their teachers to produce videos on social issues. The project is geared to finding solutions and sharing ideas. The competitive aspect of the contest stimulates participation and creativity among young people.

Young people are challenged to create initiatives that engage their schools and communities. The contest winners are determined by the responses their video produces online.

Lessons learned:
- Young people prefer to participate in a flexible structure with limited instructions;
- Participation by several partners with shared objectives fosters success ;
- It is important to convey the project's objectives in a clear, concise manner.

5. WEB IMAGE OF APATHY IS BORING [back]

Apathy is Boring (AisB) acknowledges the importance of using IT to reach young people who are disengaged. The organization's mission is to use art and technology as ways of leading young people to play a greater role in the Canadian political system.

The Web site is a key component of the work by AisB and boasts many unique features. It contributes to the organization's image, or branding, through a design that appeals to young people. It sends a clear and simple message adapted to the medium. The site is interactive and participatory: it allows users to contribute content and offers tools that nurture a sense of community belonging. The technology used to develop the site also took account of the limited technical skills on staff. Employees to update the site without relying on the webmistress.

Lessons learned:
- Using technology is a vital means of reaching disengaged youth;
- Developing Web tools demands a lot of time, expertise and money: the costs of a project must be carefully evaluated before proceeding;
- When a lot of money has been invested in a Web site, the necessary steps must be taken to keep it alive and up to date.
- To encourage return visits to the site, it must be updated at least once a week (and ideally every day).

6. GLOBAL CITIZENS FORUM [back]

Offering IT capacity building is another interesting way to engage youth. In 2007, the Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC) organized a forum on the use of art and technology to engage the public and achieve social change. The two and a half day event enabled members of the Council and young leaders to develop skills in photography, video production and other technologies related to social media. The youth involved in this initiative are still active in their communities and have been applying the skills developed through the forum. By enlisting young facilitators, OCIC drew attention to the contribution of youth as agents of social change.

Through this initiative, and through the Kaleidoscope Video Challenge, which invites young Canadians to submit video clips about world issues, OCIC noticed that some technologies appear to be out of reach for some youth. The cost associated with video is often considered prohibitive, discouraging some young people from joining these kinds of initiatives. Kris Orantes Migoya from OCIC found that potential participants who had a lot to gain from such an experience, and a lot to offer in terms of their knowledge and wisdom, were being excluded due to costs.

Lessons learned:
- Public engagement initiatives must be designed from an inclusive and anti-oppressive perspective to ensure diversified participation. This means that various potential obstacles to participation must be given consideration: socio-economic status, culture, physical skills, sexuality, cost of technology, etc.

7. ALTERNATIVES INTERNS' BLOG

Every year, Alternatives sends many young people abroad for internships in the fields of IT and alternative media. In the past, interns were encouraged to create their own blogs to share their travel and work experiences. Some of these blogs were not updated regularly and most had fallen into disuse by the end of the internships. Alternatives therefore decided to set up a shared platform for all interns. The new group blog is intended to raise public awareness and promote training, while providing the organization with an on-line record of experiences.

According to Caroline Tagny from Alternatives, the development of this shared space fosters a sense of community among the interns who read and comment on each other's input. It is also an effective means of encouraging a sustained on-line response. However, a greater promotional effort is required to make the general public more aware of the project.

Lessons learned:
- A blog with many contributors is much more lively and avoids obligating each contributor from making weekly entries;
- Contributors are more likely to participate when they are not confined to a single topic or angle;
- A workshop on publishing a blog is vital: it encourages contributors to participate and helps everyone use the tool effectively.

IV. GLOSSARY OF TECHNOLOGIES [back]

EMAILING LIST [back]

The email distribution list is a vital tool of proven effectiveness in sending out electronic newsletters, calls to action, fund-raising solicitations, etc. Its major advantage? It can reach a large number of recipients "at home," i.e., their inboxes, rather than requiring them to go to another site fro information.

On the other hand, abusing email lists can quickly relegate messages to the status of spam. To achieve the best impact, messages distributed using email lists must contain pertinent and interesting information in an easily accessible format and sent at the proper frequency.

- Putting email to work
- Designing Effective Action Alerts for the Internet
- The Virtual Activist: Using Email for Outreach, Organizing, and Advocacy -- The Fundamentals

ELECTRONIC DISCUSSION LIST (LISTSERV) [back]

While an emailing list only allows the moderator to send messages to all subscribers, a discussion list enables any subscriber to contact the entire list. Google groups are an example of such lists. An electronic discussion list fosters project coordination, consultation and cooperation, especially when drafting documents. Management of the subscriber list also creates a secured work space.

Properly used, it can stimulate significant participation. Unlike the discussion forum (see below), the discussion list easily enables users to contribute from their inbox, which is always an asset. However, the electronic discussion list is not a very effective means of reaching potential subscribers who are unaware of the list or its contents.

ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM [back]

This online discussion space enables users to post messages instantly. It fosters remote collaboration, the pooling of resources and opinion sharing. Simple to use, it can offer a user-friendly forum for discussion leading to the creation of an on-line community. Archiving the input also enables on-going discussions that are not time-limited. The Generating Momentum Web site offers an example of a forum.

When a forum is not located in a frequently visited virtual space, it needs a draw. To achieve success, this type of online community requires a clearly defined reason for existing and the participation of interested users regularly generating relevant content. A discussion forum is a good example of an initiative where participation by the right people takes precedence over technology.

- Making Online Forums Work for Community Networks

CHAT ROOM

Chat rooms are an online space where users communicate with each other in real time using their keyboards. They are an affordable, easy-to-use tool, but it can create hard-to-follow conversations. Unlike forums, they do not allow ongoing asynchronous conversations. TakingItGlobal offers live chat sessions on thematic International Days such as World AIDS day.

ONLINE FORMS [back]

These forms are used for online petitions, surveys, and information-gathering. They are simple to use: anyone who knows how to send an email can fill out a form on line.

"One click" actions, such as online petitions or cards offered by make Poverty History, where users can easily and quickly "sign-on" and give support to an action, can be a fast and inexpensive way to rally wide-spread, popular support. "One click" actions should ideally be accompanied with opportunities for further participation in order to encourage a greater depth of engagement and understanding of the issues.

BLOG [back]

A blog is a Web site, similar to a diary, where contributors can offer their thoughts, comments and observations. The input is usually posted in reverse chronological order. A versatile tool, blogs allow for instantaneous publication and facilitate contribution to Web site by selected contributors. Blogs can be used to announce events, publish articles, make resources available, and may serve as an alternative news venue.

The site Mobilizing Youth is an example of a blog. To capture visitors' interest, blogs must be updated on a regular basis. This initiative therefore demands a constant investment of time.

- 10 Ways Nonprofits Can Use Blogs
- Blogging Tips for Beginners

WIKI [back]

A wiki is a collaborative Web site that enables users to publish and collectively edit content while maintaining a record of the changes made. A wiki centralizes information to make it easily accessible. Many people use Wikipedia daily, but Muppet wiki is another original example. When it comes to collective editing, the use of a wiki has an advantages over the discussion list. Since all contributors make their corrections and comments in the same Web based document, it makes it to track all the changes. It's a dynamic, inexpensive tool that does not require a great deal of technical skill.

- Exploring the World of Wikis
- Wikis in Plain English

VIRAL MARKETING [back]

She tells two friends and he tells two friends, and so on and so on. Viral marketing happens when messages (often videos) are forwarded to colleagues, friends, family, etc. By accessing supporters' networks, it's possible to reach an exponential number of people and to achieve a significant increase in visibility. The message can be sent with an explicit request to forward it, but ideally the content should be sufficiently original, moving, or funny for the recipients to forward it spontaneously.

Viral marketing requires serious promotional effort before the viral distribution takes off. There is no way, however, of predicting whether the content developed (sometimes at great expense) will go viral and achieve the desired level of distribution.

- How to Sell Soap (an illustration of viral marketing)

PODCASTING

The term podcast is mostly used to refer to a file with radio or audio content that can be downloaded to a portable digital player. A podcast uses the magic of voice to speak directly to an audience. It also encourages rebroadcasts of relevant content, online or on the air. The creation of audio or radio content can also be an entertaining way of attracting young people and improving their media skills at very little cost.

- An Introduction to Effective Use Audio on the Web
- How to Record, Edit, and Promote a Podcast
- Podcasting in Plain English

TEXT MESSAGING [back]

Text messaging allows for instantaneous communication through brief text messages transmitted by cell phone. A popular method of communicating among young people, it can sometimes be more effective than the Internet in certain regions where high-speed is unavailable. Text messaging has proven its effectiveness in "flash mobbing" activities and opens the door to new forms of activism.

This tool is of potential use in awareness campaigns for sending occasional messages or calls to action. However, people are sometimes reluctant to disclose their cell phone number, and the cost to users can also prevent them from participating.

- Mobile Active Strategy Guide #2: Using Mobile Phones in Advocacy Campaigns

RSS FORMAT AND WEB FEED [back]

RSS format makes it possible to automatically post the latest titles published on another site. An RSS feed is useful for sharing the content of one site with others, or for updating content from sites on similar topics. It is an avenue worth exploring when the resources available for a Web site are limited. It also keeps supporters informed when new content is posted on the site without the need to use email.

- 10 Reasons Nonprofits Should Use RSS
- Feed factory
- RSS in Plain English

SOCIAL NETWORKING [back]

Social networking sites (Facebook and Rethos are two examples) connect users who share similar interests and facilitate the transfer of relevant information. Social networking sites allow for a host of applications such as trading music, bookmarks, photos, etc. For non-profit organizations, these sites offer an inexpensive way to increase visibility, promote a cause and reach potential members. Social networking sites take advantage of supporters' networks and capitalize on the "word of mouth" phenomenon. These tools are especially effective in reaching students and recent graduates.

Creating a profile usually takes only a few minutes. However, maximizing the potential of such sites takes time and requires developing "friends" in order to be included in their profile. Furthermore, because time is a limited resource, and given the ever growing number of these applications, it is important to choose the right application for the targeted audience.

The use of social networking sites can lead to a loss of control over the online information that is associated with an organization. Furthermore, another question need to be answered before proceeding: Do the necessary resources exist to respond quickly to a significant increase in requests for information?

- [Should your organization use social networking sites?](#)
- [Social networking for social good](#)
- [Eight Secrets Of Effective Online Networking](#)
- [A beginner's guide to Facebook for non-profits](#)
- [A survey of most popular social networking sites](#)

SOCIAL BOOKMARKING

Social bookmarking applications enable Internet users to archive, categorize, label and share their favourite Web pages with users in the same network with similar interests. [Del.icio.us](#) and [Digg](#) are two examples. Combined with a RSS feed, social bookmarking can help update the content of a Web site.

- [7 Things You Should Know About Social Bookmarking](#)
- [Social Bookmarking in Plain English](#)

TAGGING

Tagging results from associating a keyword, or tag, with information found or posted on the Web to make it easier to store and search. Tagged words can often be found in a box on the homepage of Web sites to facilitate the search for specific information. Assigning such keywords to online content produced by an organization can generate visibility.

- [Thirteen tips for effective Tagging](#)

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

This kind of storytelling enlists digital tools to tell a short story by combining a written or spoken narrative with music, photographs, video clips and so on. Digital stories can be an interesting way of getting the word out on the work accomplished by an organization and its volunteers, and of generating interest in a social issue. It also represents a type of engagement that has proven effective among marginalized youth, as illustrated by the work of the American organization [Bridges to understanding](#).

- [Digital Storytelling: A Tutorial in 10 Easy Steps](#)
- [Eight Tips for Telling Your Story Digitally](#)

VIDEO CONFERENCING [[back](#)]

Video conferencing is an important tool for remote collaboration because it allows meetings to take place without the need for or the expense of travel. These virtual meetings, with real time transmissions of images and interaction, can take on a whole new dimension in the public education field. As [Amnesty International](#) notes, this technology offers young people the opportunity to place themselves at the centre of another culture, issue or international crisis without having to travel. By interacting directly with the world, young people are more likely to feel personally affected by its realities. The [Global Nomads Group](#) is an organization that uses video conferencing to foster dialogue between youth everywhere.

DIGITAL VIDEO [back]

Digital video broadcasts can be an effective way to reach young people by informing them about a cause, project, etc. Digital videos are becoming increasingly cost-effective to produce and distribute through sharing sites like Youtube. However, it usually takes a lot of resources and skill to develop content that truly captivates.

Video production can also be a stimulating means of tangibly reaching young people through workshops and contests. This was achieved by the Kaleidoscope video challenge organized by the Inter-Council network. However, the cost of equipment and software may discourage some representatives of more resource-poor groups.

- Make Internet TV : Shoot, edit, Publish and promote your videos
- Photo and Video Editing Resources
- Resources on making and uploading digital videos

WEBCASTING

Webcasting consists of broadcasting audio or video content, live or recorded, over the Internet. For people located outside major cities, it provides an effective means of attending conferences or training not available nearby. From an organizational perspective, it is also an effective way to reach a larger number of people during (and after) events by broadcasting and archiving online. This technology is better for one-way transmission and not as efficient to facilitate dialogue and interaction. Consideration must be given to the type of Internet connection available to the target audience in order to ensure that video content can be viewed. The Oxford Internet Institute has archived many webcasts on its site.

WEBINAR [back]

A webinar is a Web-based multimedia seminar that allows interaction between presenters and participants. It is a practical tool for overcoming distance, but also for incorporating an interactive and more engaging approach to training.

- What stinks about webinars (Where do webinars go wrong, and how can they be improved?)

WEB CONFERENCING

A Web conference is a meeting or presentation over the Internet in which each participant sits in front of a computer and can interact with the others. Web conferences may enlist video, IP voice software (like Skype) or other tools (white board, PowerPoint presentation, chat room, etc.).

- Web-Conferencing Tools: Right for You?

Youth engagement and appropriate technology - A quick reference grid.

This grid identifies technologies that have proven their efficacy to reach certain public engagement objectives. It is not exhaustive therefore be creative… and be sure to involve youth in the conversation!

	E-mailing list	E-discussion list	Viral marketing	Discussion forum	Chat room	Text messaging (SMS)	Wiki	Blog	Online form (Petition, survey etc.)	Rss format and feed	Social networking applications	Social bookmarking applications	Tagging	Digital storytelling	Podcasting	Digital video	Video conferencing	Web conferencing	Webinar	Webcasting
Encouraging the production of information by citizens							•	•							•	•				
Maintaining personalised and sustained contact with supporters	•					•					•									
Encouraging feedback, measure the impact of initiatives, survey opinions									•											
Reaching out to disengaged or marginalized youth											•			•						
Connecting youth with similar interests											•									
Building bridges across diverse realities																	•	•		
Facilitation of distant collaboration		•		•		•						•					•	•		
Reaching the public "at home", or where they "virtually hang out"	•	•	•			•														
Mobilizing popular support in a timely fashion	•					•			•											

	E-mailing list	E-discussion list	Viral marketing	Discussion forum	Chat room	Text messaging (SMS)	Wiki	Blog	Online form (Petition, survey etc.)	Format RSS	Social networking applications	Social bookmarking applications	Tagging	Digital storytelling	Podcasting	Digital video	Video conference	Web conferencing	Webinar	Webcasting
Offering ongoing and interactive training																		●	●	
Benefiting from the word-of-mouth phenomenon			●								●									
Facilitating dialogue, sharing of ideas and collective reflection		●		●	●															
Giving youth the tools to become actors of public engagement								●						●	●	●				
Facilitating update of Web site content								●		●		●								
Promoting activities and public events	●							●			●									
Increasing visibility of a cause or organization			●								●			●		●				
Reaching or connecting youth in rural areas (limited Internet access)						●											●			
Increasing access to expertise at a distance																	●	●	●	●
Soliciting funds	●		●					●									●			
Disseminating information	●		●					●						●	●	●				●