

[News and Hot Topics](#) » Technology Acceleration: Grab Hold and Hang

On

Technology Acceleration: Grab Hold and Hang On

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

June

2007

As of this month, we are launching a monthly podcast of these Hot Topics – which either pleases you or further confounds you about the relentlessly changing world of technology. Whatever your personal feelings about such things as downloadable audio, you can't escape the fact that new technology exists and is important to many people. Therefore, *professionally*, we must all keep up.

This is not the place to teach you what a podcast is, or what's up with blogging, or what "digital convergence" means. If you want to learn, there's an almost overwhelming amount of information on the Internet ready for you to search out (you can start at <http://www.wikipedia.org> or <http://www.techsoup.org/>) – or ask someone in junior high (really). Nor is this the place to ponder the cost or accessibility of cyberspace, both of which are important but also changing radically for the better. And I certainly cannot reconcile the contradiction of a medium criticized for impersonal, low-touch communication while also raising panic about sexual and financial predators.

What I do know is that we are never going back to pre-Web days. E-mail is here to stay – permanently. Cell phones are morphing into video centers and Internet access points. Instant messaging is as ubiquitous as instant oatmeal.

Think you're having trouble keeping up? As I write this essay, the built-in Spellchecker in Microsoft Word[®] is trying to alert me to a problem with the word "podcast," which it doesn't recognize as a word (it likes "pod" and "cast" separately, but not together). The familiar red line also wants me to correct the spelling of "blogging." But my software is, of course, out of date. I can empathize.

What does this all mean to the volunteer world right now? Well, it may be frenetic and strange, but the explosion of new technologies is an enormous opportunity. Make the most of it!

Think Pictures and Sound!

Digital photography is extremely popular, yet most of the Web sites related to volunteers have very few pictures and rarely ones that are current as of today. Yet the ease and almost no cost of digital photographs let you keep changing the visuals on your Web site as often as you wish. A picture really is worth a 1,000 words and may generate 1,000 virtual hits. Show volunteers in action, at a training session, or anything else that illuminates what it means to participate in your organization's work.

Web sites such as [Flickr](#) allow anyone to post photographs for public viewing free of charge. In "[Five Ways Nonprofits Can Use Flickr to Reach New Audiences](#)" on the Wild Apricot site, they note:

Flickr has become a popular social media tool because it allows nonprofits to upload their photos and supports an active community where people share and comment on each other's photos. But what truly sets it apart is its tagging feature. Tagging (keywording) your photos makes them easily findable on Flickr and the web.

Then, join the audio production craze. These days there are free programs that allow you to record digital sound directly onto your computer (though it helps to invest in a decent microphone). So record training sessions, speeches, and other events. Then place snippets online – or even an entire presentation for those who could not attend in person.

Volunteer San Diego was a pioneer in adding both podcasting and blogging to its public outreach menu. Consider doing your own podcast (assuming, of course, you have something you want to say about the power and impact of volunteers in your organization). When was the last time someone offered you a soap box in which you control the entire message and have the potential to be heard around the world, at almost no cost?

Think beyond volunteer recruitment. Why not create a volunteer "podcast development unit" that works with each department in your organization to produce worthwhile public messages on all the aspects of your work?

Blogging

"Blogs" are logs or journals on the Web and have become both popular and easy to create. Sure a lot of them are private musings on arcane subjects, but there are also many that are truly informative. In "[A Nonprofit's Guide to the Blogosphere](#)," Willow Cook reports on how blogs can promote a cause and generate public awareness. She lists free blogging tools and ways to get your blog noticed, even by the media (who go to blogs for up-to-date information they cannot find elsewhere).

What can you blog about? Anything that's happening *now*: special events, conferences, volunteer projects. Volunteers can create blogs to discuss their volunteer experiences or, if privacy is a concern, you can set up an organization blog and be the one who posts comments from a variety of volunteers.

Blogs can be part of the organization's formal Web site or can be hosted on any number of external sites. You can learn more about the ways that organizations are using blogs at the [Nonprofit Blog](#)

[Exchange.](#)

Use MySpace as YOURspace!

It's called *social networking* and it's a growing phenomenon. Most simply, social networking is posting personal or professional information about yourself to a Web site created for this purpose and then interacting online with like-minded people who find you through keyword searches (or you find them). As always, this has captivated the young first, but all sorts of adult and professional sites are taking hold, too.

Ask volunteers whether they have posted themselves to such sites as MySpace, FaceBook, or LinkedIn (just to name a few). Then ask if they have ever mentioned the volunteer work they do with you – and, if not, would they be willing to?

We've said forever that the best recruitment of new volunteers is word-of-mouth by current volunteers. The same applies to word-of-keyboard. See what happens if volunteers share something about why they love volunteering with your organization and mention that there are openings right now for people with X or Y skills. You never know who might be online (and I mean that in a good way, not a suspicious one).

You must be kidding....

No, I'm not. I am completely aware of how steep the learning curve is and how quickly the ground shifts with ever-new devices and sites. You don't have to learn everything in order to start testing the opportunities. You don't even have to be the one who learns it at all. Put out a call for an "Online Test Pilot" and see if a knowledgeable and creative volunteer can 1) explain the potential of cyberspace developments, and 2) develop a strategy for trying a few new things that makes sense for your organization.

While it would be wonderful if your Webmaster or IT department helped you with all this, everything mentioned here can actually be done totally independent of your organization's formal Web presence. I'm not necessarily advocating an end run around bureaucratic obstacles, but remember that it's always easier to apologize than to ask permission! Especially if you are blazing a trail for the good of your organization.

- *Are you hyperventilating? Intrigued? Taking an aspirin?*
- *What new technology are you experimenting with right now? (Please share URLs of any examples.)*
- *Do you download any podcasts to a portable listening device? What appeals to you?*

Related Topics: [Social Media and Internet Technology](#) | [Volunteer Resources Manager, Role of](#) | [Trends and Issues](#)

Submitted on 28 June 2007 by Susan J. Ellis in response to Byron Webb's response.

Thanks for your posting, Byron -- and especially for challenging my statement! It proves that any outreach campaign can be successful for some situations, and mass media may well be appropriate in finding people who might be scattered across a wide geographic area -- providing that the recruitment message itself explains the specifics of exactly what you are seeking volunteers to do. My general objection to mass media recruitment is that it tends to reach a broad audience of unknown people who may or may not have the characteristics you need. It can elicit many inquiries, posing a major interviewing and screening challenge (and then having to turn people away). So, in most situations, I prefer a "mini-campaign" that is much more focused and targeted at places where it is most likely to find the sort of volunteer needed. Fewer applicants, but the RIGHT applicants. For large scale recruitment (such as 100s of people to help with an international sporting event) designed to find many volunteers, mass media can be great. But to find 3 pottery instructors or 2 board members or even 10 reading tutors, it is often more effective to send the message through narrower channels. So, as with so much else in life, whether or not someone should recruit volunteers through mass media must be answered by "it depends." Thanks again!

Submitted on 25 June 2007 by Byron Webb, University of Texas at Arlington, Student / MSSW program, Arlington Texas

I just read this piece and was particularly interested in the bit about avoiding mass media campaigns. I'm a student currently working on just such a campaign for a local non-profit and was taken aback by that statement!

I'm targeting potential volunteers in a 3500 square mile service area where more traditional recruiting methods have not fared so well. Over the last year more than %50 of our new volunteers were reached via a mass media campaign.

Based on this history, is it a bad idea to reach out via the media, even if the media chosen is limited in scope rather than blanketing on all forms of media?

Submitted on 8 June 2007 by Judi Reed, Director, Volunteer Resources, Chinook Health, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

This is really neat Sue! I really enjoyed listening to your article as an option to reading it. It's kind of like listening to talk radio. I also appreciate hearing about the ABCs of blogging, etc.

Submitted on 4 June 2007 by Brent Shintani, Volunteer San Diego, Board of Directors, San Diego, CA USA

As the producer and host of the Volunteer San Diego Podcast, I have had the opportunity to meet with so many of our wonderful volunteers and community partners. It's really hard to capture the enthusiasm, commitment, and passion expressed in a text-based web page without tools like blogs, e-newsletters and podcasts.

Our organization takes advantage of a lot of free or inexpensive web tools to help our blog and podcast development. It is true that a lot of these ventures can be hosted outside the main web page.

It's not as hard as it may seem. Many of the tools are easy to use. Blogs and podcasts can easily be referenced from the main page of your web site.

I do believe that we have had a measure of success due to the fact the our technology outreach has had the support of our entire team. Our staff, board members, and volunteers graciously take the time to be interviewed or coordinate interview appointments or provide information for short articles.

Thank you for mentioning our organization on your program, and congratulations on your new podcast!

***Submitted on 4 June 2007 by Lori McDaniel, Voices of Hope Productions, President
Shrewsbury, NJ USA***

As a filmmaker, communications professional and facilitator of other people's stories, I think blogs and online photo storage are fantastic! The great thing about Flickr is that the photos can be shared, stored and archived and then the user has a place to retrieve them so that they don't clog up storage space on their own home computers. You can email the link to your entire gallery. Plus you can get on any computer anywhere and show the photos. It's an invaluable!

A blog offers a combined Web site, layout program and communications tool all-in-one. A blog is also a great way to encourage more youth participation—they are already using these tools every day. The Girl Scouts are effectively using technology with Friendster, YouTube and MySpace to promote their annual cookie drive. FAVOR, a national advocacy organization sends a weekly email with a podcast of their conference call meetings.

These are incredible communication distribution outlets and they should be used widely. PSAs and short videos can be produced and distributed entirely through the Internet. FREE. Once the video is completed it can be uploaded to YouTube. Broadcast distribution has historically been too costly for Non-profit organizations to afford. Technology and viral marketing can be powerful for your organization, building relationships and making an impact. Corporations know. They've been using these resources for years. Now they're affordable to you too.

Suggested Links:

<http://www.voicesofhope.tv>

<http://voicesofhope.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKcZ8f4EIXM>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMSu-hR_cSk

<http://grant-writing-resources.blogspot.com/index.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viral_marketing

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viral_video

**Submitted on 1 June 2007 by Hillary Roberts, Project Linus NJ, Inc., President,
Keyport/NJ USA**

To illustrate how quickly and effortlessly Susan's leap into social networking for all busy VRM's can add, even rejuvenate, your workday....I was able to link, upload and share this month's Hot Topic podcast to 33 colleagues, using free iTunes software, that make up my online social network. I'm based in NJ and the other pros are a global roadmap who I can idea share and learn from thanks in large part to technology. Podcasts, audio books, web links, emails, chat rooms, vlogs and blogs have enabled us to connect in a way that older methods (and we still use those too) just can't or can't in a timely fashion.

If you want to branch out of your local network and include colleagues who celebrate the same profession, mission, work as you do-harness new technology. Set a goal for yourself and in no time flat, you'll be amazed at the seamless way these tools will enhance your work week.

To Susan's credit, like a well-narrated audio book, podcast and video blogs offer the listener a greater connection to the material. Like a well constructed volunteer interview, your audience will respond to what you have to convey and HOW you do so.

Food for thought: DOVIA chapters, VRM associations and non profit groups with national followings should all be considering the potential of podcasting. Meeting can be shared chapter to chapter, minutes can be downloaded and creating a cohesive network with national orgs and associations are easier than ever.

No fear (as the young people say) is what today's super tools are all about!

PRIVACY STATEMENT

Follow us   

Copyright © 1997-2025