

FROM THE BOOK

*MAKING A DIFFERENCE: HOW TO EXTEND
YOUR INFLUENCE AND TRANSFORM YOUR WORLD*

BECOME A CHANGE AGENT

BY USING THE
POWER OF STORY
IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Using the Power of Story in Social Media to Become a Change Agent

Laura Gallagher

Will a social media presence empower you to make a difference?

Other change agents like yourself use social media to:

- Share their work
- Encourage and connect with others
- Become a more effective fundraiser
- Connect with potential donors and existing donors
- Recruit volunteers
- Become a thought leader
- Create community
- Give others the opportunity to find their work, cause, or story
- Stay up to date on what others are doing
- Be an encouragement

Plus countless other reasons that are varied, both personally and professionally.

There were 3.81 billion social media users worldwide in 2020. Social media usage is up 9% from the previous year. Considering that there are 4.54 billion internet users, more

than 80% of internet users are on social media. Eight out of 10 Americans are on social media.⁷⁷

In 1989, when I started my company, there were very few ways to get a message out. You could use broadcast media or take out a print ad. You could do a mailing or buy a billboard. The channels to reach an audience were few.

All of that changed with the internet. Everyone who wants a channel to share their story and connect with others anywhere around the world can now do so. Anyone can have a megaphone. Whether people are listening or not is another question.

Essential ingredients

This is where good storytelling, creating interesting content, and planning are needed. Having a clear strategy to incorporate these efforts can also be helpful.

The challenge isn't beginning. It's easy enough to set up a social media account. The real work comes after the introduction.

Like other relationships in real life, you'll need to keep the conversation going, which takes time and a basic understanding of storytelling, as well as how your content will benefit the reader. For those who are working for a non-profit or ministry organization, you'll also want to create a social media plan.

A social media calendar is a great place to start. Think of the highlights, main events, and evergreen parts of your

77 Source: Omnicore Social Media Benchmark Report

brand story. Begin by outlining those in a calendar format and then use a tool such as HootSuite to write and schedule your content in advance. You'll likely be incorporating video into your plan and calls to action such as "sign up for our newsletter," "learn more," and "register for our upcoming event."

You are 80 times more likely to accomplish something if you write it down. To have a real impact and become more than "just a person with a presence" but one with influence, you'll need a plan and a compelling story. One important point, however: This story isn't about you. You're inviting them to change *their* story for the better as well providing an invitation to join you on a mission, whatever that mission may be.

A character in a story

A decade ago, I went to Portland, Oregon, to Donald Miller's "Storyline Conference." Donald Miller is the best-selling author of the book *Blue Like Jazz*. The Storyline Conference was something new he was trying. I was one of the lucky ones who got to be part of one of his early workshops in San Francisco. Bob Goff, author of *Love Does* spoke at the conference too. Don told us about his "aha" moment when he realized he wasn't living a good story. He then invited us to look at our own lives as a story and ask, "If you were a character in your own story, what would you do next?" He then added, "What would keep it interesting?" and "How would the character change, for the better?"

From that point on, I began thinking of myself as a character in a story. If every day, I'm turning a page, what happens next to the character? "What will keep their interest?" "What constitutes a plot change?" "Who does the character want to be in the story of their own life?" Additionally, in every great story—from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to *Forrest Gump*—there are fascinating characters who go on the journey as well. Who are these characters in your own life? Are you surrounding yourself with the right people for where your story is taking you next?

Essentially, this is what we do on social media. Our presence on social media tends to reflect the "best parts" of our lives, but not our whole life, which in reality, can be mundane and boring. Additionally, we don't want to journey alone; the purpose is to bring others into the story as well. Who do you want to attract? How can you help them? What can you give them that will make THEIR story more interesting, compelling, and infinitely better than before?

These are great questions to ask when you're developing your social media presence.

Who will you be in the room?

In 2017, I became Wisconsin's Ambassador to the United Nations for Women's Entrepreneurship Day, a global economic empowerment movement for women, by women. As part of my role with the movement, I produced a top-tier, sold-out conference in 120 days two years in a row. My primary vehicle to reach women in business and leadership

throughout Wisconsin was content creation, the generation of material—both written and visual—that would draw the right people to the event in a short amount of time. We sent 24 email campaigns in year one. We started a Facebook page for the event and ran a digital advertising campaign featuring video invitations from leaders in different sectors of the economy—from technology to manufacturing. We also cross-promoted with our sponsors sharing social media content with them for posting on their social media pages. On my personal page, I tagged every advisory board member, every speaker, and every volunteer. We worked it from all possible angles and highlighted the contributions others were making. It was the largest day-long economic empowerment summit in North America.

One of the challenges that some may need to overcome is the idea of being too self-promotional. It can help to think of being on social media as merely being in a crowded room. Who will you be in the room? How can you be helpful? How can you be kind? How can you provide value? On social media, the same basic principles apply as in any social situation.

Know your audience

When writing for your audience, it's best to know them well before you begin. Again, it's like you are already friends in real life. What do your friends like to do, think, and know? What tone works best for them? What are they most likely to respond to?

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For example, there’s a Facebook group for my hometown of Warren where people share memories. When I visit, I often write a short story about Warren and share it with the members. They love it because this is their hometown too. It resonates because it isn’t just my story, it is their own story. As I write about places that were ordinary 40 years ago, others are also transported back in time. We reminisce together through the comments. The articles are then shared with their friends. What’s remarkable to me is that many people also enjoy the stories when I post them on my personal Facebook page. It shows that one small town in America can have this special connection to all the others. We were all children once, too, and remember when things were less complicated. In this way, I’m creating more than a digital connection, but a true connection to another person’s heart and soul.

Professionally, at The Creative Company—the PR and Marketing firm I founded over 30 years ago—we begin most work by developing a brand’s customer persona. We give this “person” or persona a name to help us clarify our messaging and content. “Will this resonate with Susan?” “Will Susan like this?” “Will she share it with her friends?” “Will Josh think this is funny?” “Will he be more likely to donate as a result of seeing this post?” “Will Josh feel better after reading it?”

As you're developing your social media presence, your audience's needs must be front and center.

Attract, don't repel

Remember that listening is more important than telling and being the kind of person in the room who others want to know more about is better than being the person who is always drawing attention to themselves. It's no different than being at a party. You don't want to be that person flexing their intellectual or spiritual muscles by showing everyone how fantastic you are. Rather, by taking a position of humility and curiosity, you'll find more fruit for your labor.

As is true in every crowded room, there are often conversations you would like to leave. Your goal in developing a social media presence is not to repel people but attract them.

Relevant Magazine published a list of 15 Things Christians shouldn't do on social media in September of 2020. The list includes becoming caught up in every outrage wave, spiritual bragging, acting like you have it all together, and being too partisan.

The online Christian

There is a cultural tension about the use of social media. One of the more interesting challenges is how a Christian shares their faith on social media. I live in Madison, Wisconsin, one of the more secular cities in America. Faith is

increasingly becoming something to be suspicious of, it seems, so how does a Christian go forward?

In *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, produced in partnership with Lutheran Hour Ministries, Barna Research asked American adults how they discuss spirituality online. Through posts, comments, and profiles, many Christians believe that technology and digital interactions have made evangelism easier. They found that three out of 10 (28%) share their faith via social media, and almost six out of 10 (58%) non-Christians say someone has shared their faith with them through Facebook. So it is possible.

Social media can be a very useful tool for good. As we see every day, people are becoming influencers simply by being themselves, sharing their knowledge, and inviting people into the story.

All of this takes time, effort, creativity, commitment, and probably a financial investment in digital advertising.

Advertising and trends

Social media advertising, with the on-point messaging and a strong strategy, can be very effective. According to the special Covid-19 Edition of The CMO Survey, social media has become essential to marketing. The survey reports that social media spending increased from 13.3% of marketing budgets in February 2020 to 23.2% in June 2020—a 74% lift. Meanwhile, spending on traditional advertising is projected to decline.⁷⁸

78 <https://cmosurvey.org/results/>

We began doing social media content creation at The Creative Company in 2008, during the last recession. Through the National Retail Federation's annual Big Show featuring the largest brands in the world, we were able to see that the future would be digital. This has now come to fruition as digital advertising is more prevalent than ever. The advances of smartphone technology, as well as increased Wi-Fi speeds, has meant that many Americans are increasingly connected with their handheld devices. Families no longer gather around the television set to watch the evening news on one of the four broadcast news stations. Each person chooses what they want to watch, and to a great extent, when they want to watch it.

This gives those who want to reach a niche audience a fantastic opportunity to do so with a smaller investment. It makes what was previously not possible just a little more than a decade ago, entirely achievable today.

Making it work for you

Some final points to consider: If you have a website for your personal brand, cause, business, or ministry, you will want to drive some social media traffic to your website. Through Google Analytics, you'll be able to see which social media channels are the most effective for you.

Which leads to the final question: What channel is the best for social media? My answer is straightforward: the one that works.

About Laura Gallagher

Laura Gallagher is President of The Creative Company, a public relations and marketing firm in Madison, Wisconsin. She is also the author of *#180in120—How to Recharge Your Business in 120 Days*. Recently, she launched Mathetria Press, a publishing company for women, by women. Laura is the Wisconsin 2019 SBA's Women in Business Champion of the Year and one of fewer than 100 women to be recognized by the State of Wisconsin as a Trailblazer. You can order her book on Amazon or at LauraGallagher.us. Use Code "MAKEADIFFERENCE" and get 20% off. To learn more about The Creative Company, visit TheCreativeCompany.com. To get the best marketing insights, sign up for a free subscription to our newsletter. To get updates about Laura's ministry work and the launch of her newest venture, visit MathetriaPress.com.