The Art of Digital Communications

in Victim Services

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There has been a major shift in the way we communicate and the means by which we get our stories told. Digital communications have been unleashed. Water-cooler conversations have now been replaced by posts and tweets. Phone calls have become text messages. We don’t even use complete sentences, or words for that matter. LOL and OMG demonstrate our emotions and LTR is our good-bye. Welcome to the 2.0 world!

And while we would like to think it’s just the younger generation making the change, think again. Baby Boomers are keeping pace with the Gen X and Gen Y crowd in many respects. We are seeing print newspapers giving way to online editions, and blogs are now becoming required real estate. Facebook reaches over 750 million viewers, 50 percent who use it on a daily basis. There are more than 1,200 tweets every second. These numbers should astound any skeptic.

Digital communications are here to stay. For those that ask, “Why should we care?” the answer is simple. There is a conversation going on out there at the digital water cooler where ideas are being exchanged with or without your presence. They are talking about your organization and programs. You need to be a part of that conversation.

For many reasons, including security, government agencies seem to be lagging behind the private sector in implementing these new communication platforms. But here at California’s Victim Compensation Program (CalVCP), we recognized early on that digital media, especially social media, is one of the most effective methods for communicating and engaging with victims, stakeholders and other state organizations. It’s about being where your customers are.

Like many other victim compensation programs, CalVCP has a wide audience we communicate with on a daily basis, including: victims of crime, medical service providers, first responders, key government officials, sister state agencies, and the general public. Through a strategic use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, we are able to reach many of these audiences in a nontraditional way.

But keep in mind, social media is not just about delivering a message; it is about *getting* the message as well. We solicit and welcome feedback from our audience. We encourage them to let us know how we are doing, whether a new program is working, or if they are receiving the help they need from a victim services program. Yes, there will be some negative comments, and while no one likes to hear it, that feedback is necessary in order to continue our expanding efforts to help victims of crime.

So how can you jump into this new age of communications if you haven’t already? To begin, we suggest mapping out a strategic plan that is focused on specific goals, including:

 Understanding who your audience will be

 Gathering specific valuable information that should be distributed

 Developing a model that will allow for two-way communications

 Creating a voice to be used in all communications

 Developing a plan to respond to the needs of the audience

 Measuring results.

Creating a plan and developing content are the first steps in “going social,” and building the platforms to use will be easier. If you’re not sure how to create a Facebook page or Twitter account, ask Google. There are many social media gurus out there that can help walk your organization through the process. It will be time well spent.

A social media effort should be added as an additional tool to your organization’s outreach plan and not be a substitute for all other outreach. During a time of tight budgets, however, social media can provide a much less costly way of conducting outreach. Once in place, time spent on social sites, in monitoring and discussion, is minimal.

Digital media just makes sense when it comes to cost efficiency and immediacy. We encourage you to visit our social media efforts at [www.calvcp.ca.gov](http://www.calvcp.ca.gov) and replicate any of our programs for your own usage. If you would like a copy of our social media guidelines, please email us at [publicaffairs@vcgcb.ca.gov](mailto:publicaffairs@vcgcb.ca.gov). Your efforts to work in social media are sure to be well rewarded.