The Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra:
Building an Online Community

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Abstract

This paper studies the effectiveness of the social media deployment by the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra (HPO). It provides an overview of current practices, and suggests a strategy that could substantially improve the reach of the HPO social media activities. The framework for this paper is an application of the online community building paradigms – as presented in Jono Bacon's "Art of Community" – to the needs of the HPO. The author believes that the HPO is of tremendous value to the Hamilton community, and that its communication strategy specifically its social media activities can be strengthened by a seven step strategic plan. The plan includes among other techniques, defining more clearly its audience, merging traditional and social media into one content flow, and synergizing with similar organizations.

Keywords: Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, HPO, arts management, strategic communications, community building, community management, communication metrics, social media

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Background

The Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra (HPO) is a prestigious arts center in the community of Hamilton, Ontario. It has a well-established history with over 100 years of enriching the cultural landscape of Southern Ontario. The HPO uses social media for promotion, and a review of its website shows a remarkable community outreach focus. Programs go beyond the orchestral concerts to include an array of musical education activities, discounted tickets for youth and young adults, workshops and numerous community engagement activities. HPO has placed the local community as the cornerstone of their organization. This focus establishes a strong base for building an online community.

In order for HPO to fulfill its primary mission to provide "excellence in live music performances, community engagement through vibrant programming and education while maintaining financial stability and long-term sustainability" (HPO, 2011), HPO needs to continue to make social media central to its ongoing community engagement. A dialogic approach to social media is an essential part of an ongoing awareness campaign, raising funds, and filling seats for HPO.

The dependency of nonprofit organizations (NPO) on the support of the local community lends itself to a natural symbiotic relationship. With the availability of social media platforms, NPOs have a way of communicating with their publics as never before. Strategic and continuous dialogue with their publics through social media, as well as a personal approach to HPO's programs, will aid in building a strong community base for HPO. In order to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with their publics a social media strategy is vital to the success of HPO.

Social media offers new opportunities to build relationships and establish a dialogue with members of an online community. NPOs tend to lack in their ability to offer a forum for two-way communication in which a community is fostered (Kang & Norton, 2004), while it has long been understood that a two-way dialogue is key to successful communication (Grunig, 2001). The findings of the IABC Research Foundation concluded that successful communication is built on relationships that are achieved through two-way symmetrical communication. This creates a new challenge for communicators, and changes how we view and conduct the business of relationship building (Williams & Williams, 2009).

Thanks to social media, communities all over the world share information and promote each other while raising money and awareness. The Internet, by way of social media, has become an online space where people meet and learn from each other. According to Conner-Smith, "social networks and bloggers are changing the landscape of community," (2008, p.4). In her article "Social Capital, Doing Well by doing Good," Conner-Smith outlines several social media tools that have had a tremendous impact on NPOs by providing them with a forum to communicate with patrons, raise awareness and facilitate fundraising. These tools give NPOs a way to "reach potential donors, volunteers, and other non-profits with whom they can share resources" (Conner-Smith, 2008, p. 4).

In general, the organizational goals of any NPO are: rais-

ing awareness, fundraising, and program sales. While much work has been done in the area of communications pertaining to nonprofit fundraising and program sales (Days, 2010, Daniels, 2010, Ingenhoff and Koelling, 2009), NPOs now realize that they must also raise awareness and engage in community building, as crucial areas of development. As Chris Daniel points out in a July 2010 article in *PR Week*, NPOs "can't simply have a social media widget and expect donations to come in; they need to engage on those sites as well," (p.18).

So how can resource-strapped NPOs engage in the daunting tasks of raising awareness and community building? The availability of social media enables the NPO to engage their community at little to no cost, and in turn it allows the community to "talk back" to the NPOs. By moving from asymmetrical to symmetrical communications with a community building focus, NPOs will not only be able to raise funds but build a community that raises funds for them, builds awareness and sells out their events. Failure to engage at this level may lead the community to find another group with which to connect. Once an NPO dedicates resources to symmetrical communication, the next challenge is to create an online community that is designed to thrive (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Jono Bacon's book, "The Art of Community" offers a framework for organizations to build an online community using social media. Throughout the book he demonstrates that one of the most important factors for a successful community is that both founders and volunteers share values (in the case of HPO, the value is "love of classical music"). Bacon calls it – in somewhat exalted terms – a "belief and faith" in what they are doing. In addition to "faith," Bacon also points out that the goal of any community building strategy is to instill in everyone a sense of belonging – thus taping into people's inherent need to connect. Bacon's community building strategy – as adapted for this case study – has been summarized by the author in Figure A below.

1. Instill a sense of belonging.
2. Value what you are doing.
3. Reoccurring personal connections (continual personal touches).
4. Choose the right medium for your group. (Audience definition and mode of communication.)
5. Synergize with similar organizations and in general learn from others. Don't be afraid to share your successes and failures with others.
6. Have or create narratives, fables and stories about the community or its leaders that are easily shared.
7. Be "Yourself." Use an authentic voice.
8. Inspire the group to be one – unify.
9. Meritocracy: a reward system so that contributors have a sense of achievement.
10. Receive feedback. Have "feedback loops" built into every communication.
11. Constantly improve.
12. Share & teach others how to create buzz about the community.
13. Foster online activity by in person social bond.

Figure A: Adapted from Jono Bacon's "Art of Community" (2009)

By understanding the desire to connect that is wired into every human being, and using the above steps to engage with people online, NPOs have a unique opportunity to build community with social media. Bacon's community building tactics go far beyond just "personalize it"; they truly instill a sense of belonging.

In order to incorporate Bacon's overarching ideas into practical steps for NPOs, the author conducted five interviews with individuals intimately associated with the HPO (management of the HPO and consultants) as well as individuals associated with similar organizations in Canada and the USA. The author aimed to establish a social strategy for HPO with components for overall community building in the non-profit sector.

Research Problem

The study aimed to develop a social media strategy based on the following three research questions:

RQ1: To what extent is dialogue being sought with HPO's publics via social media?

RQ2: How does HPO measure success with their publics?

RQ3: What techniques is HPO using to instill a sense of belonging into their community?

Method

Three interviews were conducted with HPO's Executive Director, the Marketing and Communications Manager, and two Communications Specialists from HPO's outside consulting firm, Kitestring. In addition, two interviews were conducted with social media/communications managers from comparator organizations, the Regina Symphony Orchestra (RSO) and the Kansas City Symphony (KCS). The research includes an audit of HPO's current and past social media practices, specifically Facebook and Twitter.

The author employed insights from Jono Bacon's book "The Art of Community" to analyze HPO's current use of social media. The author wrote a series of 24 questions for the interview process (see Appendix 1). The questions were designed to analyze three components of the organizations: dialogic use of social media, measurement, and community building.

Definition of Terms

Nonprofit Organization: an organization that does not distribute its surplus funds to owners or shareholders, but instead uses them to help pursue its own goals.

Social Media: web-based and mobile technologies that turn communication into an interactive dialogue.

Communications Channel: the medium through which com-

munication takes place, whether traditional such as a press release, or social media, such as Facebook or Twitter.

Data Collection and Analysis

The author analyzed HPO's social media activities by reviewing HPO's deployment of the following tools:
1) Facebook pages (http://www.facebook.com/HamiltonPhilharmonic), and (http://www.facebook.com/pages/What-Next-Festival); analyzed according to Jono Bacon's guidelines for building online communities.
2) Twitter usage for a one-month period (http://twitter.com/#!/H_P_O). Analyzed by classifying by hand the set of August 2011 tweets, and the Twitalazyer tool.
3) The HPO Website (http://www.hpo.org/) analyzed according to Jono Bacon's guidelines for building online communities.

The author also reviewed the following documents:
1) HPO's internal communications notes and marketing plan
2) HPO's Strategic Plan
3) HPO's 2010 Annual Report
4) 2010 and 2011 marketing campaigns and brochures
   And from comparator organizations:
1) RSO's media releases, website, Twitter activity, and Facebook page
2) KCS's blog, website, Twitter activity and Facebook page
3) Los Angeles Symphony (LAS)* website, blog, Twitter activity and Facebook page.
*The LAS was also contacted for an interview, however the author did not receive a response.

Overview of HPO's Social Media Practice

This section starts with a table summary of HPO's current social media plan (Figure B, below), extracted from their internal communications notes (the 2011/12 season). As HPO fine-tunes its communication strategy, these notes should be expanded, in light of the findings given in this paper.

• Social Media/e-news
o Develop a social media strategy with details on what to post when and where and which outlets are most appropriate for certain messaging   o Solicit more details/stories from the musicians to be disseminated through social media outlets, e-news   o Solicit feedback through our social media networks along the lines of "why is the orchestra important to you". Circulate these (e-news, maybe house programs)
• Website
o Media kit available for download on the website   o Key messages available for the public (i.e., how to spread the word about the importance of the orchestra to your friends)   o Form for people to submit feedback online

Figure B: HPO's internal communication notes, 2011/12 season.

Figure C provides an overview of HPO's audience and their current usage of social media communication tools.

Communications Method	Number of People
E-mail List	About 2,000
Twitter Followers / number of tweets (for 1 month)	693 / 339
Facebook Page / What Next? Festival Page	323 "Likes" / 255 "Likes"
You Tube Subscribers	5
Flickr Comments / Gallery Views	0 comments / 366 views
Traditional Mailing List	3,000

Figure C: Audience Definition and Activity as of September 26, 2011

Facebook Analysis

A 2009 public relations study performed a content analysis of 275 NPO's Facebook profiles. The study examined how the NPOs were utilizing Facebook to advance their missions and programs. The study analyzed the following three areas: disclosure, information dissemination, and involvement. The researchers found that "solely having a profile will not in itself increase awareness or trigger an influx of participation," and that "social networking sites would force public relations practitioners to rethink how they approach relationship development with their stakeholders" (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas, 2009, p.106).

HPO has two Facebook pages, one for their organization and one promoting the "What next?" Festival. The author reviewed both Facebook pages, according to the community building strategies of Jono Bacon, and looked for examples of "effective" posts from the organization's use of Facebook. An effective post has one or more of the following criteria:

1) Posts that created or aimed to create dialogue;

2) Posts that encompassed an aspect of community building; and

3) Posts that built buzz.

> "What an amazing opening night – thanks everyone! What did you think?" (Posted on September 26, 2011, on the HPO official Facebook page).

This post is a good example of engaging the community to get their feedback from an event. The post garnered two "likes" and five comments from the Facebook community. HPO should also consider adding pictures, or video from events. If they do not have the resources, perhaps they could enlist members of the community to contribute to Facebook in this manner.

> Now a post example that were deemed less effective:

> "I can't stand the suspense! What's your overall feeling about the Festival now that it's past? Maybe on a scale of 1-10??" (Wendy S. posted this to HPO's official Facebook page on February 8, 2011).

This post is a great example of the type of excitement you want from your community. However, the post made on the official HPO page, is deemed less effective, as it is referring to the "What Next?" Festival. This festival was given its own page and discussions were already underway by the community in that forum. When the community member went to post, they went to the official page, thus it may not have reached the 254 fans that were already engaged on the other Facebook page. Most likely the community members are the same from both pages. However, centralizing the community in one space and letting them make it their own is an important part of community building. The above examples demonstrate that centralizing Facebook pages and integrating Twitter into Facebook would make the communications director job easier as well as the help the community dialogue with HPO.

Further Facebook analysis showed that the "What Next?" Festival Facebook page has not had any activity since May 10, 2011. While that is most likely because the festival is over, having a Facebook page dormant could present a negative

image to HPO's supporters. One suggestion would be for HPO to communicate in the description box on the left side of the page "The Festival runs from February 3-6, 2011. For all other HPO updates visit our official page" in order to avoid confusion until they were able to integrate or delete the page. The public relations study previously mentioned also found this same result: "Most nonprofits lack the resources or time to provide constant attention to a Facebook page. Creating a profile and then abandoning it will create only a minimal exposure for the organization, and it could turn off potential supporters if they witness inactivity on the site" (Waters, et. al. 2009, p.105). In general, having two Facebook pages dilutes the content, and the user is not presented with a consolidated view of what HPO has to offer. Once the public's attention is captured, it should be given as much as possible – not to overload, but to retain and offer, and create a perception of healthy activity and engagement.

Twitter Analysis

A Twitter analysis was conducted by reviewing HPO tweets from a one-month period (August 25 - September 25, 2011). The author looked for tweets that demonstrated synergy, dialogue, as well as one-way promotional, or informational characteristics. The author developed the following keys to identify and mark each tweet:

S: (Synergy): Tweets that create synergy: sharing information with or for other organizations

D: (Dialogical): Tweets that display a dialogic component; responding or answering to another's tweet

P: (Promotional): Tweet that are meant to promote HPO's programs; includes selling tickets, fundraising and raising awareness; generally asymmetrical in nature

I: (Informational): Tweets that were purely informational to their publics – generally involving news, and administrative in nature

RT: (Retweet): Tweets that did not encompass any of the above

and were simply a retweet.

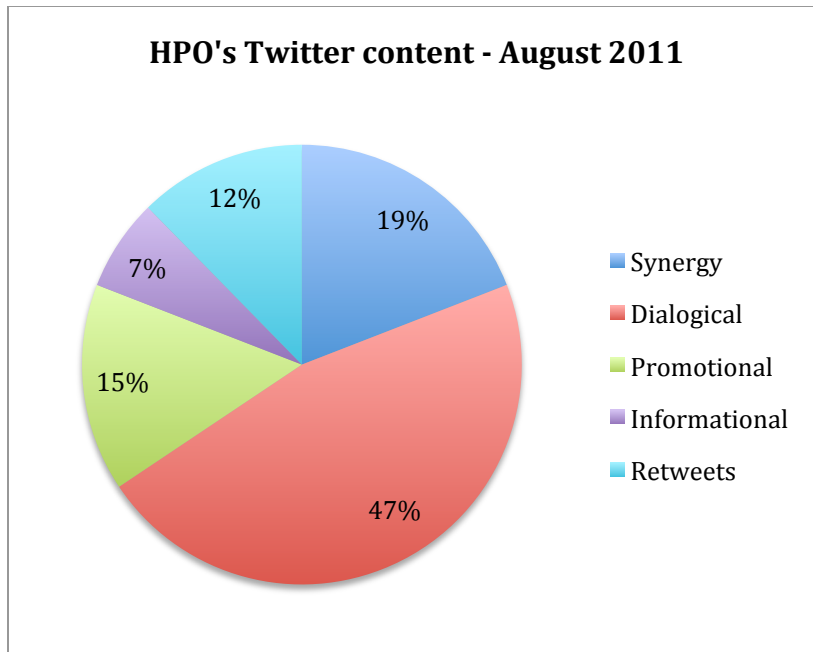A review of HPO's tweets for a one-month period demonstrated the following:

Figure D: Chart of HPO

Twitter Usage for the month of August 2011

The chart in Figure D shows that the Twitter usage by HPO is successful – it is dialogical in nature (half of the tweets fall in the category of dialogical), one-quarter of the tweets show synergy with other organizations, and 12% of Tweets are retweets, which also shows a high level of community engagement. Finally, only 15% of the tweets are promotional, which means that the followers receive relatively little advertisement, or "spam" from HPO. The 7% informational indicates a low percentage of "dry" tweets that only convey information. And finally, at the outset of the study (mid-August), HPO had 693 followers; as of September 25,

2011, HPO has over 750 – this increase is consistent with a successful usage of Twitter.

In order to further refine the analysis of the usage of Twitter, the researcher used the Twitalyzer tool (http://www.twitalyzer.com) to measure eight categories of Tweets for HPO (@H_P_O, in), over a period of one month. The results are summarized in Figure E, and discussed below.

@H_P_O	Score	Percentile
Impact	2.4%	82.7th
Engagement	58.9%	58.9th
Influence	1.6%	85th
Clout	7.1%	87.5th
Generosity	56.2%	82.5th
Velocity	19.5%	84.9th
Signal	93.8%	61st
Potential reach	14,423	77.1st

Figure E: Twitalyzer summary of HPO tweets

The impact score is 2.4%, putting @H_P_O in the 83rd percentile of all Twitter users. This classified by Twitalyzer as an "everyday user," meaning: having a small circle of influence but great potential. @H_P_O has 759 followers, and in turn follows 759 Twitter users. Impact is defined as a combination of the following:

- The number of followers a user has
- The number of unique references and citations of the user in Twitter
- The frequency at which the user is uniquely retweeted

- The frequency at which the user is uniquely retweeting other people
- The relative frequency at which the user posts updates.

The engagement score is 58.9%. Twitalyzer's engagement summary provides a measurement of the type of interaction @H_P_O has in Twitter by examining the ratio of people referenced by the user to the number of people referencing them. @H_P_O can improve here by mentioning by name some if its followers with more frequency. On the other hand, @H_P_O is in the 58.9th percentile in this category, which according to Twitalyzer's overall ratings is good.

In the following 4 scores, @H_P_O is placed between the 80th and the 88th percentile, which is a good score (80th percentile means that 80% of Twitter users have lower scores in a particular category).

The influence score is 1.6%. Influence is the likelihood that a Twitter user will either retweet something @H_P_O has written, or at least reference @H_P_O. While this definition is similar to clout, Twitalyzer's influence takes both retweets and references into account, whereas clout only looks at references. @H_P_O can improve this factor by requesting retweets, or, which is harder, writing in an engaging way that motivates retweets.

The clout score is 7.1%. Clout is the relative likelihood that @H_P_O will appear when searched for in Twitter. The generosity score is 56.2%. Generosity is the percentage of updates in which a user retweets other people. The velocity score is 19.5%. Velocity is an indication of the relative frequency at which @H_P_O publishes updates in Twitter. Again, @H_P_O does well in this category.

The signal score is 93.8%. The signal score, also referred to as "Signal to Noise Ratio," indicates that one of the following is present in measured updates:
- A hyperlink containing "http://"
- A reference to another person as evidenced by the "@" symbol

- A hashtag as indicated by the "#" symbol
- Some type of indicator that the update is retweeting some-
  one else.

The potential reach score is 14,423. Roughly speaking, this gives us the sum of Twitter users that would be reached if all the followers of @H_P_O retweeted; in other words, it is the total sum of followers of all the followers of @H_P_O. Thus, the reach of @H_P_O could be increased dramatically (a 20 fold increase) if more of its messages were retweeted.

The conclusion based on Twitalyzer's analysis is that HPO uses Twitter very well. However, HPO could potentially reach many more people if it crafts its tweets in such a way that HPO's followers will retweet them more frequently. For example, try to make every word count: on Twitter the user has a mere 140 characters. Be concise, and even use less than the 140 characters - try to go for about 85 to 100, to make your tweet more retweet-friendly. Also, graphics expand the story: a good image or graphic, or, in the case of HPO, music, complement a news story. Linking to a picture or music with Twitter tells a story with far more impact (Handley & Chapman, 2011).

The review of HPO's Twitter and Facebook usage demonstrated a high amount of activity on Twitter. However, this usage is based on the assumption that this is where HPO's public is listening; but, is this the case? It is a temptation in the deployment of social media to use a particular tool because of its low overhead; legacy issues; or simply it is the tool that the organization wields most easily. But, it is important to deploy the tools that reach the public in the most effective way. As Bacon puts in his analysis, we have to listen first, find out where our audience is located, and then choose the most effective tool (whether Twitter, Facebook, e-newsletter, etc.) to reach them. That said, daily tweets should continue – someone is undoubtedly listening – but they should be secondary to a systematic campaign on Facebook, which is more appropriate for HPO in terms of demographics.

Results

The perpetual challenge of most nonprofit organizations is not having enough resources to fulfill its mission. Often these organizations have to choose using their manpower to raise funds, over building programs or raising awareness. One of the things this author disliked the most in over a decade in the nonprofit sector was the weekly phone call from a well-meaning supporter with the next best idea on how to raise money for the organization. The problem with great ideas, as they say, is that everyone has one. Chances are that for an NPO they have more great ideas than the manpower to fulfill them. The goal for this research is not to give any more good ideas to a small NPO whose main challenge is raising funds, but rather to lay a framework where creativity can be supported and good ideas will flourish.

The social media strategy that emerged is based on the specifics needs of HPO. Examples were taken from their use of social media as well as the comparator organizations. The author believes that the main framework is ideal for similar NPOs to implement, with possibly just a few minor tweaks. Based on community building strategies where HPO has room for improvement, the researcher offers the following seven steps as a framework for HPO's social media strategy:

1. Define their audience
2. Choose social media communication tools distinct to each audience segment
3. Outline an effective communications flow and content plan
4. Synergize with similar organizations
5. Use dialogic principles in all social media activity
6. Develop meaningful metrics
7. Technological support.

With these seven steps HPO will be able to lay the framework that will enable them to establish a vibrant place within

the Hamilton community. These findings are discussed in detail in the next section.

Social Media Strategy Based on Key Findings

Define the Audience (1)

Several key areas of improvement emerged from the interviews with HPO staff and consultants that could help the organization build dialogic relationships and build community. In the interview with HPO Executive Director, Annelisa she stated that "the people who attend orchestras primarily have a bachelor's degree or higher". According to Stats Canada, Hamilton, Ontario's population as of 2006 was 504,559 (www.statscan.gc, 2011). Of these people only 15,420 had a university degree or diploma. Given that HPO not only has a smaller population in which to market to and an even smaller group that generally attends orchestras, this dramatically decreases the typical audience pool for ticket sales and for raising funds or awareness.

The following example of outreach to perspective new audiences emerged from the case study. When asked the question "do you have an example of a failure with your community", the HPO communications director cited a recent campaign where they tried to engage a younger audience by promoting HPO's "Under 30" program on college campuses in the Hamilton area. As an idea, this campaign seemed to be right on target: it is desirable to bring in a new generation of music lovers, and the nearby campuses seemed to provide the right pool from which to extract this new generation.

The campaign consisted of a flyer that was placed on university and/or college dorm room knobs, with catchy, although sexually charged phrases such as: "why suck when you can blow?" and "feeling horny?" paired with musical instruments on the front. The back of the flyer promoted a Facebook contest in which students could win a $350 Ikea gift

certificate and tickets to the HPO simply by posting pictures of their dorm room and the comment "Music lives here and so do I!" on the HPO Facebook wall.

The author found this campaign in stark contrast to the knowledge of orchestra audiences that surfaced from the interview with the HPO executive director, "The people who attend orchestras primarily have a bachelor's degree or higher". This campaign garnered dismal results and failed to engage the younger audience, and it could have potentially offended their target audience with whom these students share the campus – educators who are the right demographic.

It is clear that defining their audience is a crucial first step in establishing a social media strategy. The researcher recommends that HPO work internally or with outside consultant (Kitestring) to define top audiences within the community. Once the work has been done to identify core members of the HPO community, the next step is prioritizing communications around them and choosing the social media tools accordingly.

Choose Social Media Tools Accordingly (2)

Once the audience is defined, a next important step is to discover what method of communication suits each segment of the audience. Jono Bacon speaks to the importance of this step: "your communications channels are the very lifeblood of how ideas, problems, and solutions flow between the different members of your community. The golden rule here is to ensure that anyone can reference every communication online after it has occurred" (Bacon, 2009. p. 139). It is important to first define the audience, know how they want to be communicated with and then check to make sure they are receiving the communication. One simple way of doing this is to ask important members of the community how they prefer to be communicated with and how often. For some it will be regular mail, others email, others Twitter or Facebook.

Making sure that feedback loops are present in each communication channel is equally important in choosing and utilizing social media tools. Feedback loops include: receiving emails from core community members, seeing a response from them on Facebook or a retweet on Twitter. Bacon shares that the most productive feedback for his communities has been surveys and one-on-one discussions. Online surveys in general can gather excellent results.

This process of choosing appropriate social media tools should include reviewing past HPO communications data to uncover which communications channels received the most feedback for each audience. A brief review of HPO's current social media usage demonstrates that most communication is done via Twitter. This would coincide with the communications director statement that she has received the most feedback from the Twitter community as well. However, are the respondents on Twitter members of the core community they want to engage with?

Once HPO can map that their communications are being received by core community members a SM strategy can be built around these community members; first, in terms of what tool to use (regular mail, Facebook, e-newsletter, etc.). Then, target the community in terms of the content and the style.

Outline an Effective Communications Flow (3a)

After HPO has defined their audience, chosen the appropriate social media tools; the next strategic step will be to establish the organization's ideal communication flow, merging traditional and social media. Throughout the interview process an area of analysis arose with each organization that the researcher was not initially looking for. The challenge with social media communications is that it generally involves traditional media as well. A great temptation of social media can be to overlook traditional media outlets in turn for the easy, quick results achieved through communicating online. This is

a danger for HPO as it could exclude a large portion of their audience. In order to develop a thorough strategy for HPO, a question was added to the study for each interview.

The question asked: "in what order and through what mediums do you generally disseminate messages to the RSO community? And which ones would you repeat?"

The question aimed to uncover the ideal way to merge traditional and social media for communications. The researcher thought it important to share all the results, allowing HPO to draw from several examples while developing their own communications flow. Both comparator organizations (RSO and KCS) began almost every communication with a traditional press release. The content from the press release was then used in various other communications. An example of KC Sympohny's* communication flow is:

1) Begin with press release
2) Post on website
3) Headline on website homepage and scrolling news feature
4) Facebook post
5) Twitter
6) Email blast.

If the communication is via video, their communication flow is as follows:

1) Post video on YouTube with priority email message to subscribers of their You Tube community
2) Post video on website for general public
3) Send video in e-blast to entire community
4) Post on Facebook.

*It is interesting to note that in the case of KCS that they end with their Facebook and Twitter community rather than start.

Kitestring suggested the following when merging traditional and social media into the ideal communications flow:

1. Write a press release that includes a snazzy image and tie it to relevant news of the day/ week. Send to contacts/call and follow-up.
2. Write a blog post
3. Post the blog to Twitter and Facebook using mes-

sages that speak to those respective audiences.

4. Mention the post in conversation online with others, the whole team gets involved. It's like the message is a cloud that hits the community, rains, and then moves on to the next (Meg Coppolino, 2011).

Twitter and Facebook are excellent because they are so economical. But be careful not to squander your Twitter or Facebook currency by being obtrusive, pushing the message to point of annoyance. It almost works just as well to mention it to someone in particular while using the right hashtag on Twitter (Meg Coppolino, 2011).

Kitestring is the only one in the interviews to mention the use of blogs. This social media tool should not be overlooked by HPO.

The author found an example of effective blog usage by the Los Angeles Philharmonic (LAP). Quick short blog entries such as those done by LAP are a great way to meet the organizational goals of raising awareness, funds and program sales, as well as reach core community members. Audiences that read blogs tend to be educated mature adults and young people. Including a blog as part of their communications flow could potentially reach new and significant audience members. Review of the LAP blog posts also demonstrate a great example of feedback loops with the use of a comments box at the end of each entry. This incorporates the dialogic approach that is ideal in all social media communications (http://www.laphil.com/blog/, 2011).

The final example of setting up communications flow came from RSO's communications manager, Taron Cochrane. In general, he begins all RSO communications with a traditional press release, then a Facebook status update, billboards and radio ads and then uses Twitter as a final reminder. He feels that the Twitter audience is a more select group and does not consider RSO Twitter followers the gen-

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eral public. He also mentioned that word of mouth is a huge factor in communicating RSO's mission and building awareness (Taron Cochrane, 2011).

Content Development (3b)

Once HPO establishes its ideal flow for content, the next challenge is utilizing the content to maximize its resources and time. Developing content for NPO's communications director is a major challenge as they are responsible for more than just communications. It is crucial for any NPO to maximize all content that is developed. Content comes in many forms and not just from the communications director. Whatever is written, recorded or spoken from any member of the community can be disseminated through each communication channel according to which channel is suited for each segment of their audience. By disseminating content through all channels, this will maximize their content and save time.

An example of utilizing content can be found in HPO's 2011-2012 Season "Music Lives Here" marketing brochure. This brochure contains great content for HPO to disseminate through all of their communications channels. The pictures are eye catching, the quotes are personal, and the information is already in place. According to Jono Bacon's "Art of Community", a main component of building community is "creating narratives, fables and stories about the community or its leaders that are easily shared," (p. 8). The content in this brochure could be transferred without difficulty, to the HPO website, used for blog posts, sent out in the e-newsletter, and then finally "teased" as headlines on Twitter and Facebook back to the online forums which house the content.

The theme "Music Lives Here" actively draws people into the HPO community just by its very words. The first page opens with an introduction from HPO's Music Director, James Sommerville, and the opposite page has a striking full color photo of very attractive violinists. Musicians from the orchestra are sprinkled throughout the brochure with person-

al quotes that highlight their involvement with the community of Hamilton. One quote from Neil Spaulding, a HPO Horn Player states:

> I've been friends with Jamie (the HPO's Music Director) since we were kids hanging out and playing street hockey. Little did I know that years later we'd both be deeply involved with the community of Hamilton and that he would be my Conductor. You never know where life is going to lead you!

Sharing these types of personal narratives will build community. Once a flow of communications is established for HPO, the dissemination of the content in the brochure would be a great starting point to put through the communications pipeline. It is also important here to remind a NPO of the "buzz cycle when disseminating content (Bacon, 2009).

1) Preparation: Ensure website is in place, and that all key information about your community and how to get involved is available.
2) Buildup: Post "Coming Soon" types of messages.
3) Announcement: On the date of the announcement publicize in every communication channel pertinent to the event. Drive people to website.
4) Review: See how far your announcement spread and where it reached. Did you receive feedback in any of these channels? Did the types of people you want respond?

Synergy with Similar Organizations (4)

With a grounded understanding of their audience, social media tools in place, and content flowing through communication channels, HPO next strategic step would be to begin focusing on synergistic relationships within the Arts community. Sharing information and building relationships with

similar Hamilton based or other Arts organizations around the world, is a key component to building community.

In regards to this point, Kitestring's creative director, Chris Farias stated "HPO is fighting for the same audience as two other venues in the city; Theatre Aquarius and The Hamilton Art Gallery". "Fighting" may be the wrong paradigm: in the comparator interview with KCS, the media manager stated that: "They have a long established collaboration with all the arts organizations in their city, in fact we meet once a month". The groups work together by sharing ideas, best practices and growing the arts community as a whole for Kansas City. This year the top three arts organizations are bearing the fruit of working together by the grand opening of a new multi-functional symphony hall in which all three organizations (and others) will hold their performances in the state of the art facility. By synergizing with similar organizations, they are fulfilling step number three of building community "Synergize with similar organizations and in general learn from others. Don't be afraid to share your successes and failures with others" (Bacon, 2009, p.77).

HPO has already connected online with members of other Arts organizations in Hamilton and abroad. The key is to keep building and looking for ways to work together. Two steps were uncovered from the interviews on how to practically achieve this: Chris Farias from Kitestring stated, "The next step is to earn Twitter dollars … do this by listening to their conversations, interacting with their community, then helping them promote their events as well."

RSO's Communications Manager, Taron Cochrane, pointed to this same use of Twitter by sharing that the majority of his Twitter use is "helping others, then every once in awhile throwing a message out about RSO and asking others to share." By working with similar Arts organizations in the area instead of each organization fighting for the same audience, HPO will meet two of the key steps in building community: sharing information and creating synergy.

Dialogic Use of Social Media Tools (5)

Once the audience has been redefined, social media tools chosen accordingly, a communications flow outlined, and a paradigm shift of synergy created, HPO should apply an overarching theme of dialogue to all social media usage. Luckily, social media tools lend themselves to this type of use. The change should be a minor one for HPO as many of their Twitter and Facebook usage demonstrated dialogic use.

In general, NPOs can fall short in symmetrical communications with their community due to the constant need for fundraising. With limited staff and means, it is not uncommon for a communications director to be engaged with a small fraction of their audience, instead of creating dialogue with others. Using a dialogic approach to social media tools while applying the community building principles outlined earlier in this paper, HPO should be able to engage and grow their online community. Dialogic use of social media will enable HPO to view their community as active and equal participants, and that communication with their audience is really a conversation with other "classical music lovers".

Measure What Matters Most (6)

The above strategy would not be complete if HPO failed to measure its success in a year from now. The return on investment (ROI) of social media is that HPO will be around in 100 years and contributing to a vibrant Hamilton community. The best measurement is built in at the start of a program, not hastily added on at the end. To do this, HPO must have a clear set of measurable objectives built into their communications plan.

Many organizations do not believe social media has any value because of the challenge of measuring the ROI. Measuring what is meaningful to a NPO must be based on what matters to the organization. In order to find what it is that

makes the organization tick, the staff should spend time brainstorming what they see is important and how it ultimately contributes to the bottom line. From these findings they should be able to identify their key performance indicators.

Social media has a built in temptation for an organization to simply measure its success by the number of "hits" to their website, "likes" on their Facebook page, or retweets. This data can be a helpful starting point as to what matters to the community, however, finding meaningful measurement within their social media communities is the challenge.

Jono Bacon and social media expert Eric Qualman remind us that it is *people* who make those hits and they can in turn provide our best data when given a voice. Bacon recommends harnessing the power that lies within the public by building in a "feedback loop" to gain meaningful data as to whether organizational goals are being met. "We want our measurements to feed into our interpretations of what we're doing and to trigger changes that can further improve our work" (Bacon, 2009, p. 189).

Examples of important measurements could be discovering how many Twitter followers or Facebook fans attend concerts or events or perhaps donate to HPO. Another measurement could include observing how long someone is engaged in the online community before they participate in an event or spend money with the organization. This could be established by assigning a "birth date" for each new follower/fan, and sending them a welcome note/post/tweet when they "arrive" to the community. Then annually on the same date, send a personal note as well. With proper measurement tools in place, HPO will be able to make a case for the final step in building strong community; systems support.

Technological Support (7)

This final step should perhaps be the first. Building and maintaining social media tools should be a priority for every organization. Having a system administrator or a member of

the team (even outsourced) that can help with maintenance of online tools is imperative. Bacon offers a good piece of advice that applies to any type of community manager, tech-savvy or not: "the last thing you want to be doing in your community is spending time fiddling with tools. You should instead be focusing your efforts on growing community, building a team and achieving the objectives and goals that you outlined in your strategic plan,"(Bacon, 2009, p.50). This pearl of wisdom enables the communications director to focus on the people in the community and not on the upkeep of technology.

Conclusions and Limitations

The author offers the above strategy for HPO with the awareness that the conclusions were reached from an outsider's perspective. While several hours of interviews were performed, documents and social media usage were analyzed, the author realizes that this is still a narrow perspective on an organization as complex as HPO. While the strategy the author developed listed seven steps for effective community building using social media, there were six remaining steps to community building that HPO met and exceeded.

HPO proved to be strong in using an authentic voice in their communications, as well as being consistent in their social media communications. The staff and outside consultants all had a strong and vibrant faith in what they are doing: bringing a valuable service to the people of Hamilton. Their current communications instill a sense of belonging in their community and they are not afraid to try new things and expose the community to a variety of conversations. The staff also made a point to attend community-related events and said while they were out, they would run into HPO ticket holders on the streets of Hamilton. By being active in the surrounding community and having in-person encounters, HPO is fostering the social bonds that are built online, but sustained through real community contact.

In addition, HPO demonstrates a significant amount of strengths within their online community and use of social media tools. These include a strong and active Twitter presence, a growing community on Facebook and a "stay in touch" button on their website, which enables community members the opportunity to get involved and provide feedback. HPO also has several "advanced" features such as video and picture galleries to engage the visitor on their website. They also house all of their e-newsletters on the website with "share" capabilities built-in to each one.

Several weaknesses emerged from the study, including trouble defining their target audience and an effective communications medium. HPO also lacked a cohesive flow of content through established communication channels. The point of social media tools is that they are a "hook" into more developed content; in general, Twitter and Facebook are not ends in themselves, but means to engage the community into more content, provided on the webpage or blog. A blend of traditional and social media seems to be lacking as a press release has not been posted to their website since October 2010, but Twitter and Facebook post have been consistent.

One limitation is that the author did not analyze HPO's monthly e-newsletters. This is an important area of communications and content management that should have been included in the analysis. The study was limited to social media channels and e-newsletters were not considered part of the analysis at the outset of the study.

A second limitation came in the analysis of Facebook and Twitter. While social media tools are naturally conducive to dialogue, they are not the best place to retrieve information. The author found it difficult to analyze both Twitter and Facebook for cohesiveness of HPO's communications. Further Facebook analysis would have contributed to the overall findings as well; as the current analysis was limited to providing feedback on only six postings.

In general, HPO's community should experience their social media as a visit to a friend. The sites should be dialogic in nature; and the successful deployment of social media requires: listening, engaging and interacting. The interaction should not be only between HPO and its public, but it should also encompass other orchestras. This creates an impression of belonging to a vast family of "classical music lovers" that spans provinces and even countries; the result of visiting Facebook, HPO's website, or connecting on Twitter, should provoke a sense of belonging, and excitement – seeing others spend money on concerts, and valuing the experience, can become the best marketing arrow in HPO's quiver as well as the basis for building an online community.

Acronyms

HPO: Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra
RSO: Regina Symphony Orchestra
KCS: Kansas City Symphony
LAP: Los Angeles Philharmonic
NPO: Nonprofit Organization

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions for Employees of for Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra

Introduction:

I am working towards my Master's degree in Communications Management at McMaster University in Hamilton. My current research project involves nonprofit organizations and their use of social media to build community and promote the organization's brand. The following questions have been designed to measure the effectiveness of social media deployment by nonprofit organizations, especially from the point of view of creating a two-way dialogue with their stakeholders and establishing an online community.

This is a graduate school project in which the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra staff has generally agreed to participate without any obligations. I have 24 questions, which on average take 40 minutes to answer. The results will be presented to my professor and classmates. The results will be used to form a proposed social media strategy for the HPO. I will send you a summary of the study as well. For the purpose of accuracy, I would like to tape record the interview. Do I have your permission? May I have your permission to use your name in the study as well? Do you have any questions before we begin? Please know that you can stop this interview at any time.

Interview Questions

RQ1) To what extent is dialogue being sought with HPO's publics via social media?

1) Do you have a full time staff committed to social media?
2) What systems does your organization have in place to receive feedback from your constituents? For example: Q&A tab, comment area, media/press area, or a designated contact person?

3) Among the social media tools that you employ, which tools have provided you with the most feedback from your constituents?

4) How often do you use social media to communicate with the HPO community? Select one: Every day? Once a week? Once a month? A few times a year?

5) What type of message do you primarily communicate with social media? Examples: Event information, fundraising, personal messages, campaigns, "thank you" letters?

6) Does HPO use social media to network and build community with similar organizations?

7) Does HPO share any form of information with other organizations or publics?

8) What have you learned from members of your online community?

RQ2) How does HPO measure success of the communications with their publics?

1) Does your organization have a communications plan that includes social media?

2) Does HPO have a survey for new members?

3) What are your personal goals with social media communication?

4) What are your organizational goals with social media communication?

5) Can you recall a specific type of communication that inspired the community to be more engaged?

6) Do you have an example of an online success with your community?

7) Do you have an example of a failure with your community?

8) What do you perceive as the greatest barrier to establishing effective Key Performance Indicators for social media for HPO? KPI is a non-financial performance metric for essential business functions. Four areas that are generally measured are: 1) Financial, 2)

Customer, 3) Internal business processes, 4)Learning and Growth. The validity of an influence performance metric is entirely a function of you influence strategy and operations.

RQ3) What techniques is HPO using to instill a sense of belonging into their community?

1) To what extent has HPO used personal narratives within its use of social media?
2) Do HPO social media staff use the HPO-branded media for personal communication? If so, how?
3) In what ways does HPO maintain an "authentic voice" in social media?
4) In what ways do you let your community know that they are part of the overall success of the HPO community?
5) Do you have community members that are always present for you – both online and offline?
6) What specific communications have you (or HPO) taken to establish relationships with them?
7) How does HPO use social media to teach existing members of the community to share the message with others?
8) How do you view your online space? As a stopping point for potential customers, or as personal visitor coming into your office?

Conclusion

We have reached the end of the formal interview questions. Before we finish, is there anything related to your non-profits communications that you would like to add? Do you have any questions or comments?

Thank you for your participation. This concludes the interview. Your time, insights and candidness are very much appreciated. In the case of any need for clarification or follow up questions, may I contact you? Thank you.