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Social Media Marketing Program for Grand Rapids Symphony

by
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TARGET AUDIENCE

According Grand Rapids Symphony Marketing Manager Jacalyn Wood, it is the Symphony's goal to build relationships that lead to attendance at Symphony events (personal communication, April 7, 2011). This marketing plan will use the Symphony's current target audience for its current Facebook Page to address this goal. It will include men and women of all ages living in West Michigan. Women aged 35-65 will be a sub-target. This audience will be the same for all the relationship-building activities outlined in the following program, even those outside of Facebook.

MARKET COMPETITION OVERVIEW

LOCAL COMPETITORS

The Grand Rapids Symphony competes with other area arts organizations for gifts and donations and for attendance. While the Symphony frequently trades contacts with other organizations and partners with St. Cecilia Music Center to host concerts, it must also work to attract new subscribers and supporters from a shrinking pool of candidates. These candidates have a multitude of choices to give their money and time to, especially in philanthropy rich West Michigan. Following is a brief outline of the Symphony's major arts-related NPO competitors.

St. Cecilia Music Center
UICA
GRAM
GVSU theatre and music performances
GR Civic Theatre
Circle Theatre
West Michigan Symphony Orchestra
Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra

The key advantage within the NPO arena is the Symphony's voice. The Symphony is the distinctive advocate for music performance and education. No other Grand Rapids organization provides the musical services and experiences offered by the GRS.

However, any performing arts organization is also in the entertainment business. The Symphony's ticketed concert events compete with music offerings by large entertainment venues in downtown Grand Rapids, including Van Andel Arena, St. Cecilia Music Center, and The B.O.B. restaurant and club complex. In the past, Van Andel Arena and the Symphony have booked similar guest artists within three weeks of each other, sparking intense competition for ticket sales. Following is a brief outline of the Symphony's major entertainment industry competitors.

Concerts at Van Andel Arena
The B.O.B.
St. Cecilia Music Center
GR Civic Theatre

What separates the Symphony from these competitors is its rich and extensive mix of local and global performers. Symphony musicians and chorus members live and work in W. Michigan while offering their community world class performances all year. The Symphony also books guest artists and big name performers from across the globe to perform special events that draw sell out crowds.

STATE / REGIONAL COMPETITORS

In Michigan and the larger Great Lakes Region, the Symphony's notable competitors are other symphony orchestra organizations. Competition with these organizations is primarily for recognition by media entities and attention from consumers. The majority of GRS tickets are sold to West Michigan residents. Following is a brief list of regional competitors.

Lansing Symphony Orchestra
Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Flint Symphony Orchestra
Chicago Symphony Orchestra
West Michigan Symphony Orchestra
Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra
Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra

State/Regional Symphonies' Social Media Activity – Likes and Followers
Likes and followers are not a measure of social media success. The figures below represent the efforts of the organization to connect individuals to a social media channel by promoting liking and following throughout their marketing program.

- Facebook				
Lansing SO 889		GRS 2433	Indy SO 5266	
- Twitter				
Lansing SO 964	Tweets- 1295	GRS N/A	Indy SO 2734	Tweets-851

OBJECTIVES

- Increase connections to GRS Facebook page by 50%
- Acquire 100 followers to GRS blog/RSS feed in first year
- Increase traffic to www.grsymphony.com by 20%
- Increase average attendance at Classical Series concerts

STRATEGY - OVERVIEW

The idea is to intensify and enhance the Symphony's participation in social media by establishing a unified voice that frequently publishes desirable content to Facebook and within the larger West Michigan blog community. All messages will point to www.grsymphony.com, but will be broadcast through a network of media partners and GRS owned communication channels.

Think of the network of activity like a tree with the existing GRS website acting as a deep root system. www.grsymphony.org is an excellent information base where patrons find in-depth information about artists, concerts, and ticketing. This rich source of information will feed content to the social media activity network.

CONTENT STRATEGIES

Encourage RSVPs to GRS event listings
The Facebook Page will host event listings that parallel the listings available on the website. Each concert's listing is its own entity, like a Page, that users can indicate association with by RSVPing and sharing through Facebook. As the Symphony's social media participation intensifies, so will awareness of these event pages and willingness to RSVP.

RSVPing is important because it is a demonstration of commitment that reinforces desired purchasing behavior. Facebook users constantly use membership in groups, Likes, RSVPs, and link sharing as badges that project a version of their personality. Consumers expect active and official Pages to have event listing content. If this component was missing, visitors to the Page could be turned off and the Symphony would miss opportunities to initiate relationships.

Create online discussion about GRS related guest performers, musical pieces etc.
This strategy increases the circulation of information about upcoming concerts. Discussion will generate further interest in concerts that is grounded in the enthusiasm of music fans. Online discussion also represents an opportunity for the GRS to live out its core value of community engagement.

Organize and direct Facebook users to Page content
Lists and pages of links, photos and videos are overwhelming. Without direction or encouragement, users can miss valuable content.

OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Expand social media presence of GRS
The GRS blog will share content with West Michigan bloggers and link to their blogs in return. It will partner with two groups of partners for sharing and syndication.

The main group is composed of the blogs/Pages of the Symphony's current media partners and several local culture monitors.

These are:
Grand Rapids Social Diary - blog and Facebook Page
WGVU – Facebook Page only
STAR 105.7 – Facebook Page only
WOOD Newsradio – Facebook Page and selected personality blogs
Revue – website and Facebook Page

A second group of partners specifically addresses the sub-target audience of women aged 35-65. West Michigan Blogs is a regional organization that holds monthly networking meetings. While not restricted to female bloggers, women currently write most of the member blogs and focus on sharing about lifestyle topics. Jolon Hull of Savvy Chic Savings heads this organization.

Some of the blogs affiliated with this group include:
Savvy Chic Savings (www.savvychicsavings.com) – coupons and discounts
Whole New Mom (www.wholenewmom.com) – health foods and all natural cooking
Jodi Michelle (www.jodimichelle.com) – personal blog, parenting
Eat Local West Michigan (www.eatlocalwestmichigan.com) – wines, local food news
Big Binder (www.thebigbinder.com) – parenting, activities for children in W. Michigan
What Megan's Making (www.whatmegansmaking.com) - recipes

Expand digital media buy on social networks and mlive.com
The activity on Facebook and the other networks will be supported by an expanded digital media buy. There will be a yearlong campaign comprised of buys on Facebook and mlive.com. Different ads will run to support each season in addition to special ads that direct users to the new GRS blog.

TACTICS

Some tactics are repeatable actions, like running a Facebook ad. Others are actions that are maintained and refreshed, like launching a new blog. At the end of this section is a recommended schedule of implementation. Tactics are tagged with their corresponding strategy in italics.

GRS BLOG

A dedicated music blog written by Symphony representatives will be integrated into the home page of www.grsymphony.com. In Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman's book "Content Rules", Mike Volpe, Vice President of Marketing at HubSpot, emphasizes the centrality of the company blog to their digital strategy. According to Volpe, blogs are "great vehicles through which to establish thought-leadership and build trust and credibility with potential customers" (p. 240). He contends that blogs are key to driving traffic from search engines. A blog that is written to be naturally rich with keywords and is integrated into the GRS home page will be a continual boost to the Symphony's ranking in natural search.

Handley and Chapman point out that the content of a blog creates value "by positioning you as a reliable and valuable source of vendor-agnostic information" (p. 70). For a non-profit like the Symphony, to be vender-agnostic is to embrace its role as a member of the West Michigan community. The GRS will recognize other organizations, including other regional symphony orchestras, as friends and partners in the social space.

The blog, indeed all social media activity, will be an expression of the Symphony's core value of community engagement. By sharing information resources online through the blog platform, the organization can become recognized by its followers for reliability, quality, true concern, and deep value for their daily life.

The blog will feature three different types of posts:

- Key articles written around each upcoming concert that provoke engagement and analysis of the music, composers, and performers.
- Authoritative (researched), yet concise, responses to significant issues that arise in education, society, and the performing arts.
- Sharing links to content that is relevant to regional and national cultural interests

In many small companies, responsibility for the blog rests with one individual in the marketing department. However, in "Perspectives On Social Media Marketing" Stephanie Agresta points out that "more and more brands take on co-authored corporate blogs" that allow multiple individuals to publicly speak for the brand (p. 209). The GRS blog represents an opportunity for the community to experience the collective expertise and passion of Symphony musicians and staff in a new and

highly personal way. These individuals should be approached to contribute content on a monthly schedule much like rotating editorial contributors at a magazine.

Conductor John Varineau's summaries of musical works performed by the Symphony already appear in every program book and occasionally online. Shortened versions of these articles, enriched with multimedia if possible, would make great blog posts. Suggested blog contributors include: Conductor David Lockington, Conductor John Varineau, Symphony musicians, and selected administrative staff.

While those in the organization who are experts in their field should write blog articles and responses, sharing links to quickly refresh the blog and Facebook Page with quality content will be integrated into the daily responsibilities of dedicated marketing staff. This is called content curation. Handley and Chapman identify this method as an effective way for new blogs to quickly accumulate content and begin appearing in search results (p. 90). It consists of handpicking relevant content for your audience. Audience members cannot filter through the flood of information available on the Internet for the best content; it's not their job. They follow those whose opinion and taste they trust to do the job for them. However, Handley and Chapman caution that curation is not a shortcut for marketers; it must be used to complement original content and not as a silver bullet-like fix (p. 90).

One way marketing staff can filter for and discover new content is by using Google Alerts and an RSS reader to automatically aggregate a large pool of content from the web. Staff can then filter through these results and post the best of what they find.

The goal will be to post twice weekly and to respond to comments and questions on the blog within 2 days. Agresta suggests that marketers set a precedent of consistency for their writing (p. 212). According to Agresta, it can be a disappointing turn off when audience members visit a website expecting something new and find entries dated months in the past. Writing in in response to the same topic, her colleague B. Bonin Bough says that new content should be there when the audience expects it (p. 213). For the Symphony, a twice-weekly schedule will provide a challenge to help the marketing staff and blog contributors stretch their skills to meet a media environment that will only pick up speed as consumers elevate their expectations.

Encourage RSVPs to GRS event listings; Create online discussion about GRS related guest performers, musical pieces etc.; Expand social media presence of GRS

DEVELOP SYMPHONY ADVOCATES

Advocates will be identified as people and organizations that are passionate about sharing the Symphony's message with their own network. B. Bonin Bough believes that the unique truth about social media is that it's centered on having others enthusiastically share your message rather than broadcasting it yourself (p. 75). The Symphony will pursue relationships with audience members so that increasing numbers of followers exhibit this passionate sharing behavior around the blog and Facebook Page.

In order to jump-start this sharing, the Symphony will arrange partnerships with WGVU, Revue Magazine and Grand Rapids Social Diary to distribute the blog's content through their own networks. These three groups are local influencers with strong web and Facebook presence that will complement the blog's entertainment and community enrichment focused content. The GRS Page will engage with these groups' Pages on Facebook so that Symphony followers Like Revue and vice versa.

Symphony advocates can also be private or public citizens like radio hosts, Grand Rapids Press staff, Symphony musicians, or other enthusiasts. The significant characteristic of a GRS social advocate is frequent linking and commenting action. In the beginning, the Symphony's regular media partners and blog partners will be the main contributors. Symphony followers will pick up this activity.

Expand social media presence of GRS, Create online discussion about GRS related guest performers, musical pieces etc.

FACEBOOK / MLIVE.COM DIGITAL ADS

The focus for Facebook ads in the program year will be linking to new blog Posts, promoting each of the Symphony's concert series, and special ads for sales/promotions as needed.

It is important to note that social media activity must be integrated with continued investment in more conventional media, including digital display advertising and Facebook ads. Ads in these channels make it easy for the W. Michigan audience to immediately connect to the benefits of following the Symphony's social media activities.

Expand digital media buy on social networks and mlive.com, Encourage RSVPs to GRS event listings

THE FAN GATE - INCENTIVIZE "LIKING" OF THE GRS PAGE

When new visitors find the GRS Page on Facebook, they will be prompted by a splash page to click the Like button. After a non-fan becomes a fan by Liking the page, the fan gate will no longer be seen. The page will automatically refresh to display a tab called "The Latest from the Symphony".

Also called a “like block” or “like wall”, the fan gate will capture more likes by reminding visitors to like the Page before they interact further.

There is dispute over the value of fan gates. Rafe Needleman at tech news site CNET.com recently wrote a blog post claiming that fan gates devalue the personal recommendation that a Like supposedly represents (“Facebook: Liked to Death”, 2011). Some outspoken commenters on Needleman’s post even claim to have forsworn using Facebook for personal and business use because they perceive fan gates to be coercive. Webtrend Apps president Peter Yared wrote an article for ReadWriteWeb.com that asserted, “like blocks rarely work” and quoted a 50% or more drop-off rate as proof (Why Most Facebook Marketing Doesn’t Work”, 2011).

In response, a later ReadWriteWeb article by Michael Jaindl, chief client officer for Buddy Media, identified a falty assumption of Yared’s argument (“Actually, Facebook Marketing Does Work (If Done Right)”, 2011). Yared’s 50% drop off statistic depends on all fan gates being the same. Jaindl says that the drop off rate for some fan-gated pages may indeed be that high, but the rate can actually vary depending on the industry of the brand and the incentive being offered. Fan-gated Pages that do not deliver on their promise or offer little of interest in the first place obviously turn off visitors. Meanwhile, Jaindl says that deep discounts, free samples, and must-see content offer the kind of value that visitors willingly click Like to access.

The key to executing this tactic is making a promise with value and then keeping that promise. While it is up to the marketing department to decide what to offer as an incentive, it is absolutely essential that staff follows through to deliver the value promised on the fan gate.

Encourage RSVPs to GRS event listings, Organize and direct Facebook users to Page content

“THE LATEST FROM THE SYMPHONY” TAB

Since it’s the first thing a new fan sees after they Like the Page, the automatic refresh to “The Latest from the Symphony” tab also ensures that a new fan is immediately rewarded for their Like. If there is no special offer or other limited time incentive, this tab should be filled by default with a simple menu of organized content that is ready to be shared.

The valuable foundation of content that already exists on the GRS website is currently being missed by its social media followers. This tab will be like a sampler for new visitors that simplifies their experience by organizing the most current available content. Viewing the content will lay the groundwork for a new visitor’s relationship with the Symphony.

Encourage RSVPs to GRS event listings, Organize and direct Facebook users to Page content

INTERN UPDATES - POST FROM LIVE EVENTS

The GRS Picnic Pops series is the Symphony's chance to relax and focus on the fun of contemporary pop music. This is an opportunity to let fans behind the scenes. One marketing intern will be charged with updating the Page from a mobile phone or laptop onsite. Updates will be text and photos of concert prep activities with reports of candid moments with volunteers and concertgoers and other useful information like parking/seating tips.

Special events, guest writers and exclusive pieces of information liven up the publishing schedule of the blog and can be fountains of content that staff can draw from.

Create online discussion about GRS related guest performers, musical pieces etc.

EVALUATION

For this program, the key to quantitative evaluation will be monitoring traffic to www.grsymphony.org. Google Analytics will provide data on the source of visitors and their activity while on the site. However, this method requires that all outside content shared by the GRS through social media be directed through the website. For example, if the GRS wants to share an article written about it by the Grand Rapids Press, the GRS should not use the article's actual URL.

Instead, a blog post should be written summarizing the article. The URL of this blog post should be used whenever the GRS wants to share that content. Since the blog is integrated into the www.grsymphony.org, social media followers will be directed to the site where Google Analytics can track their source and behavior. This practice will encourage consistent blog updates in addition to enabling effective tracking and evaluation.

Social media tactics must also be evaluated qualitatively through careful observation and listening routines. Software packages are available that enhance the ability of staff to perform the critical task of listening to followers by monitoring the frequency and type of mentions, sentiment, and trending discussion topics. Recommended titles are listed below.

Viralheat-	offers three plans, $9.99 - $89.99 monthly. Basic monitoring can be expanded to an organization wide system. Little customization.
Radian6-	full service monitoring and engagement programs personalized for each client. $600 to start, 50% off for qualified NPOs.
Sysomos-	offers Heartbeat, a tool for daily monitoring and measurement. Little customization, basic functionality. No price information available.

In addition to regular listening and observation with a software package, the following tactics can be evaluated by examining data provided by Google Analytics.

GRS Blog	Symphony Advocates*
Facebook/mlive.com digital ads	"The Latest" tab on Facebook Page

* Symphony advocates at Revue, WGVU and Grand Rapids Social Diary will be asked to use GRS blog URLs for sharing content as well. In addition they can choose to use Google URL Shortener (goog.le) to track clicks on links to non-GRS content in any other GRS related posts.

The following tactics can be evaluated by examining data provided by Facebook.

Like Wall	Intern Updates
"The Latest" tab on Facebook Page	

SELECTED EXAMPLES OF EXECUTIONS

INTERN UPDATES - POST FROM LIVE EVENTS

A welcoming and youthful tone is recommended to frame the messages. Intern updaters should be encouraged to show their unique personality through their updates. This tone will necessarily be distinct from the voice of Symphony communication established by other tactics. To prevent confusion, a blog post introducing the intern and promoting the event will precede the event.

This is Marcel, your intern for tonight's show! I'll be posting behind the scenes action all day, check back often for new shenanigans!

Do you realize how many balloons have to be inflated? This is insane. So out of breath... like playing a tuba through a straw…

FYI - the grass is still super wet from this afternoon. yes I tried it out for ya, yes my behind is damp, you're welcome. bring chairs!

I'm so excited, and I just can't hide it... I know I know I know the gate opens soon, so get your tickets ready!

We're getting closer- I see less and less green on the hill! Some excellent spots open in left center!

bringing dinner is a great idea. I see everything from foi gras to KFC and it's all good! mmmm some wine, some cheese, some Beethoven!

Just fantastic, @dklockington and Symphony friends you are great! just a few minutes until fireworks

Sorry for the delay, they're resetting the big ones and we'll get started soon, promise!

~¡Fireworks!~ so beautiful tonight! my favorite is the one shaped like a treble clef, or was that a star, I dunno. describe your own fav!

THE FAN GATE - INCENTIVIZE “LIKING” OF THE GRS PAGE

“THE LATEST FROM THE SYMPHONY” TAB

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