

Digital 101

Introduction to Digital

For a long time, our primary way of communicating with members was direct and one-way. These one-way communication methods, like radio, TV, and public relations, allowed us to only broadcast information to audiences, without getting valuable feedback and ideas for improvement.

With the advent of digital and social media, we now have more direct lines of access to our members, and vice versa. Digital platforms are an important tool in our communication toolbox – a tool to be used in concert with offline organizing. Our union's future will always depend on the personal connections our leadership and staff have to their educators, union members, and their community. With digital integrated into your communications strategy, you can develop deeper relationships, identify new supporters and prospective members, and scale your mobilization efforts where you may otherwise not have a physical presence.

Start with Storytelling

Your digital program should be a storytelling program, full of content that serves a purpose. Compelling stories should be used to form a relationship with your audience and educate them about your key issues. In order to create a clear narrative, think about organizing your content into themes, like human interest stories, education content around key issues, or policy content around legislative moments. Tap into your audience's emotions. Good storytelling is all about creating an emotional response from your audience. Emotion – more than reason – drives action. The best digital content:

- Tells a story
- Is visually interesting
- Is tailored for each platform
- Is consumable and shareable
- Communicates a theory of change that motivates people to take action

Digital Goal-Setting

Any digital plan should have a clear goal or intended outcome in mind. Before you write an email, set an ad budget, or name a campaign, answer these five questions:

1. Who do you want to reach?
2. What story do you want to tell them?
3. What do you need them to do?
4. What content do you have or need to create?
5. When do you need to see results by?

Digital Best Practices

Follow these best practices to ensure that your digital content is compelling and effective with your audience.

1. **Be conversational.** The tone coming from your website, email, and social channels should align with the way our association speaks about students and public education. You are the face and voice of your affiliate, so when writing for different channels, consider the spirit of your members, students, and community. Remember that on social media, you are next to posts about weddings and babies – social media is the space to be even more personable, entertaining, or relatable than other channels, like a press release or news media.
2. **Communicate regularly.** Be timely. Is there a new school board budget coming up for a vote? News about how recent efforts have reduced the time students spend on testing versus learning? Stay on top of education-related news at the local, state, and national level. Make sure your digital community is the first to know about relevant issues through your channels.
3. **Consider your objective.** Before sharing a post or sending an email, consider what point you are trying to make, what value you are providing, and what action you want your online community to take.
4. **Be thumb-stopping.** It's hard to grab and hold someone's attention online. With your content, be sure to lead with an attention-grabbing phrase. Be concise; boil down your key points to fit within individual posts, rather than asking people to click to read more.
5. **Show, don't tell.** The importance of visual media on social channels is undeniable. Visual media will catch readers' eyes, making it more likely for them to take a moment to read your post. Visual content, like images, videos, graphics, and links, should make up a majority what you share.
6. **Invite participation and action.** User-generated content – photos or text posted by users on social media sites – can play a big role in successful social media channels. Encouraging user-generated content tells your audience that you are interested in hearing their voices. Prompt participation by asking for personal stories or reactions to your content.



A Closer Look at Facebook

Facebook is a platform to foster community and generate action. Make your members feel connected to one another by sharing human-interest stories: how others just like them are overcoming challenges, doing incredible things, and creating a better world. Facebook also drives calls to action, whether that's commenting, signing a petition, or even donating.

- **Make it digestible.** Content like lists, short captions, and photos are more likely to grab a followers' attention. Dense text can often be overlooked. Vary your content types; include a mix of images, articles, actions, graphics, and discussion prompts. Because of Facebook's algorithm, always add content directly to the Facebook (e.g. upload a video vs. posting a link to YouTube) to maximize potential reach.
- **Create a dialogue.** Facebook creates an ecosystem for conversation. Use commenting features like linked comment threads, longer form text boxes, and multimedia within comments to generate thoughtful discussion.
- **Learn about your audience.** Using Facebook's Insights feature, you can figure out

which posts received the most clicks, likes, comments, shares, and overall engagement. Insights will also tell you the demographic breakdown of your followers, the times your followers are most often online, and other data that can help you tailor your content and posting schedule. Replicate and test successful content types, times of day for posting, and more.

- **Balance quality and quantity.** Post 1-2 times on Facebook per day. If something noteworthy occurs, posting more than once a day is fine. Facebook uses an algorithm to determine which posts are seen and when. To make sure your posts are getting in front of your audience, maintain a consistent schedule. Posting too frequently will cause your posts to compete for attention with one another.



A Closer Look at Twitter

Twitter is a peer-to-peer broadcasting platform, where like-minded organizations, journalists, and enthusiasts are looking to connect with each other and have conversations around key topics. Use Twitter to increase visibility for your mission.

- **Connect on a professional level.** Share knowledge unique to you – break news around your association’s efforts and share your point of view on relevant current events. Use the platform to connect with journalists and network with others who are contributing to public education conversations, either locally or at the state or national level.
- **Use hashtags to your advantage.** Hashtags classify and connect related social posts on certain topics. Use hashtags to start a conversation, respond to participants, or join a conversation. For example, #DearBetsy was a popular conversation thread during the DeVos confirmation hearing; #EdChat is the national hashtag used most frequently to discuss education issues. Using hashtags like these will help people who are interested in these topics discover your tweets and your account. Don’t go overboard, though. While tweets with hashtags receive more engagement than tweets without hashtags, engagement drops when two or more hashtags are added to a tweet.
- **Vary your posting times.** Tweet when your audience is likely to be checking their Twitter streams. Try commuting hours, during lunch hours, and even on the weekend. When to tweet which content will depend on who you are trying to reach. Journalists and political staffers are on Twitter during work hours, while members are more likely to check Twitter outside of school hours. Tweet at different hours of the day (and night) to learn when your audience is most receptive. Tweets get buried in users’ streams fairly quickly, so aim to post consistently to keep your channel active.
- **Links increase retweets.** Tweets that contain links receive higher retweet rates than tweets without links. While Twitter is not a primary channel for converting action, think of links like a social media currency: ideas are shared in exchange for favorites, retweets, or even thoughtful discourse. Twitter users are searching for knowledge to absorb and share. Links are the primary means of doing just that.



A Closer Look at Instagram

Instagram is a mobile-based, visual-first platform used to share images, videos, and stories with a community of followers. Instagram rewards engaging and interesting photos and videos above all else. Because it’s hard to drive action off of Instagram, use this channel to build a closer relationship with your supporters by sharing visuals that show the people behind the union – the names, faces, and stories of members, supporters, communities, and students, and the actions they are taking.



- **Focus on the image.** More than any other social platform, Instagram is all about visual media. It does not have to be a professional-level image to perform well. Your content should be authentic. Aim to capture the emotion of a moment, story of a person, or feeling of an event. Captions should complement an image and help explain a story. Whenever possible, keep copy short to avoid having a reader click to read a longer caption.
- **Use hashtags to increase visibility.** Hashtags help classify and collect content on like topics. They also provide an opportunity to reach supporters who are not following your feed. You can create new hashtags for specific campaigns, like #DearBetsy, which was used during Betsy DeVos's confirmation hearing. Or, use hashtags to take part in existing conversations, like #DreamActNow or #EdChat. Using hashtags will help people who are interested in these topics discover your content and your account. Don't go overboard; keep it to 3 - 4 hashtags max per post.
- **Tell a story.** Instagram's Stories feature allows you to post photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours. Users view Stories posts in a sequence, making it a great place to weave together pieces of content to create a compelling narrative. Instagram Stories can be used to cover a live event, like a rally or meeting, or to dive into a topic that might be too complex for a single Instagram post. Mix up using photos and videos to keep your story compelling. Layer copy, hashtags, and location tags on top of photos to help explain your story.



A Closer Look at Pinterest

Pinterest is a social media platform that allows users to bookmark and share content in the same way you might add magazine clippings to a pin board. While Pinterest is less widely used than other social channels, it's a very popular channel with teachers, who use the channel to find and save valuable classroom resources. Pinterest is primarily used to find and share creative ideas and is an ideal space for our members and potential members to connect with the union as a valuable resource in the profession; it is usually not an ideal space for explicitly political content.

- **Set up unique boards.** Pinterest allows you to organize content onto different category "boards." These boards allow you to cluster like content together. Boards can be created for different topics, like Classroom Behavior Tips or topics that your affiliate might be focused on, like Justice and Equality in the Classroom. Create a set of boards that work for the content you will be sharing.
- **Curate your content.** Once you have boards created, add content – or pins – to your boards. You can do this by searching Pinterest for content related to your topic and saving those pins to your own board. While searching for relevant content, you can also find other users to follow. Their content will populate in your home feed. You can also add content from around the internet directly to your own Pinterest boards. Add a "pin it" button to your web browser. This button will allow you to save content from other websites directly to Pinterest.



A Closer Look at Email

Email is one of the most effective channels for getting people to take action, whether that's turning people out for an event or gathering petition signatures. Email can also be used to educate supporters on key issues, share moving stories that create community, and open a two-way conversation with members. Because of the ability to engage and motivate sup-

porters, email should be an integral part of any digital campaign.

- **Focus on the basics.** One of the most important factors of email is driving someone to open an email. When creating an email program, focus on compelling subject lines – something intriguing that will get supporters to open. You should also pay attention to the email sender name. Is there a leader in your affiliate who people know well? Use their name to help increase open rates.
- **Keep it friendly.** Keep it brief. When writing emails, avoid language that is overly formal or stuffy. Email, just like other digital channels, is casual in nature. Your email tone should match that style, while remaining professional. Be concise; use only the amount of space needed to make your point. People have short attention spans, so make sure you hit your key points early on.
- **Make your ask.** Make your asks bold and prominent. Bold and underline links so they stand out in the email copy. Don't bury your ask – make sure it's prominently placed in your emails so readers don't have to search for what you want them to do. Don't just ask once; make your ask twice (or three times!) in each email.
- **Explain your theory of change.** A theory of change is an explanation of how you will turn the resources you have into the power you need to change what you want. Readers want to know how and why the action you are asking them to take will create change, and how what you are asking them to do is credibly going to help reach a goal. Make sure to articulate your theory of change. This doesn't have to be in the format of an if/then statement, but make your ask clear and believable.

Measuring the success of your digital program is a fundamental part to running a smart and effective program. By measuring your success, you can see what works well, and adjust what does not. Reviewing measurement data will also allow you to determine how to best spend your time in future campaigns.

In reviewing metrics, it's important to focus on the right data – data that maps back to specific objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs). When looking at data, avoid vanity metrics – those data points that look good on the surface, but don't tell you about how people are engaging with your content. Vanity metrics include things like total list size or impressions. Instead, focus on the metrics that tell the real story. These include:

- Audience Growth: How many people you reach.
- Engagement: How your content activates and inspires users.
- Amplification: How well your content is being promoted and shared.
- Conversion: How effective your content is at getting people to take action.

Audience Growth: As you execute your digital program, it's important to grow your audience. The bigger your audience, the more potential there is of people seeing your content, engaging with your content, or taking action off of your content. These are numbers that should be monitored for growth over time. Key metrics to look at include:

- Facebook: Followers
- Twitter: Followers
- Instagram: Followers
- Pinterest: Reach
- Email: List growth

Engagement: Engagement rates are the best way to measure the overall quality and effectiveness of your social content. They look at how people are liking, commenting, or sharing your content. Engagement numbers can be calculated on a per-post basis, or in aggregate over a period of time for each channel. Engagement metrics to look at include:

- Facebook: Engagement rate
- Twitter: Engagement rate
- Instagram: Engagement rate
- Email: Click-through rate

Amplification: Amplification metrics give you an understanding of the reach and awareness of your content. People who are deeply engaged with your content are more likely to share or repost your content, helping to grow your audience over time. The metrics to look at include:

- Facebook: Shares
- Twitter: Retweet rate
- Pinterest: Repins

Conversion: Any time the goal of your content is to drive people off of a social platform to take an action, the key measure of success is conversion rate. Whether driving email sign-ups, phone calls, or petition signatures, measure success by looking at how well you're able to convert people to take your action.

- **For email**, conversion rate can be calculated by measuring the number of people who complete a desired action, and dividing this by EITHER the total number of recipients or the total number of unique clicks. Conversion is calculated differently depending on the platform you're using for your mass mailer.
- You can also use **Google Analytics** to measure website conversions. By setting up Goals in Google Analytics, you can measure how well your site fulfills your target objectives. A goal represents a completed activity, called a conversion. An example of a goal is submitting contact information on a form. Having properly configured goals allows Google Analytics to report on critical information, such as the number of conversions and the conversion rate for your site.

Glossary of Terms

Theory of Change

A theory of change is an explanation of how you will turn the resources you have into the power you need to create the change you want. Readers want to know how and why the action you are asking them to take will create change.

Hashtag

A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by the “#” sign. #Hashtags are a simple way to mark the topic (or topics) of social media messages and make them discoverable to people with shared interests. On most social networks, clicking a hashtag will reveal all the public and recently published messages that also contain that hashtag.

Retweet

A reposted or forwarded message on Twitter.

Instagram Story

Instagram Story is a way of sharing photos and videos with your followers. Stories disappear from your profile after 24 hours, unless you add it as a highlight to your profile. To share a photo or video to your story using the Instagram app, tap in the top left of your screen or swipe right from anywhere in Feed.

Conversion Rate

How many people convert on an action, divided by the number of people asked to take the action. This rate gives you a sense of how well people are engaging with your ask.

Vanity Metrics

Vanity Metrics are data points that give you a surface-level view of your digital media performance, but don't provide an accurate view of how people are engaging with your content. Vanity metrics include things like total list size or impressions. Instead, focus on the metrics that tell the real story.