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Sustain-Ability

Guidelines to Social Networking and Media Partnerships

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1. Project Context

The Sustain-Ability project stems from the need to build new sustainable paths for cultural organizations in a period of profound change arising from the transformation of their operational framework. The crisis that Italy has been undergoing for years is the result of a radical and fast-paced reorganization of production, distribution and consumption of products and services. It is a process that involves every segment of society and every sphere of production and which makes it necessary to develop tools for organic growth and enhancement of organizational practices in the third sector. In this context, the non-profit can and must achieve sustainability. Only a full understanding of the resources available and the social impact of their work can lead cultural workers to strengthening their skills and becoming drivers of change, through the adoption of strategies and tools that allow them to handle the complexity and forecast action lines in changing scenarios.

It was in this backdrop that *lettera27* felt the need to build a toolbox for self-analysis and improvement of its own performance, drawing on complementary skills from the areas of risk management (*Kwantis*) and online publishing (*Doppiozero*). This is how Sustain-Ability came about.

Within this framework, Sustain-Ability develops models and tools aimed at the sustainability of non-profit cultural organizations, producing public guidelines under Creative Commons®, which allows the use and replication of toolkits.

The purpose of these tools is to improve the performance of organizational and project management in cultural organizations by increasing the measurability of the transparency of their activities.

Why measure performance? The system of performance measurement and assessment is a process of acquisition, analysis and depiction of information necessary for the pursuit of the organization's needs, acting as support for decisions made in pursuit of improvement, and ultimately as a basis for reporting the results to stakeholders.

By measuring performance it is possible to plan and program activities (defining measurable objectives over the short- and mid-term), measure the deviations (gap) between expected objectives and results, and take the necessary action to correct the gap or more methodically manage the organization (planning -> control -> timely corrections).

2. Introduction

This document summarizes the work done over the last year within Sustain-Ability concerning the adoption of social networking tools. The objective is to provide some general guidelines that can help the communication department position itself in social networks. In no way can this be considered a prescriptive document. Given the ever-changing landscape of social networks, the tools outlined here are intended to be perpetually in beta: never definitive, and constantly subject to a process of revision.

It is important to emphasize that in no way can this document replace a thorough study of manuals and theoretical texts. The appendix contains a short bibliography.

This paper is divided as follows: in the theoretical part, some lines of general guidance are identified on the types of capital available to the organization, and what logic is best suited to bring these resources to fruition. Outlined below are three performance indices (Website, Twitter, and Facebook) composed of a variety of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

The proposed indicators are purely indicative, and should be considered as suggestions to be fine-tuned and revised over time based on the choices made by the overall communications plan.

Below are some possible procedures for contact with social media partners, a more general reflection on media partnership, and some final reflections.

3. General Considerations

The treatment of non-economic forms of capital is an issue of growing importance, whether in regards to individuals, groups or organizations.
From an analytical point of view, to frame the issue it can be useful to adopt a four-party capital model derived from sociology.
The most obvious form of capital available to an individual or organization is *economic*: the amount of monetary resources and assets able to be mobilized. Another type of capital is *cultural*. In its classical meaning, cultural capital was formalized through a number of accreditations given by the traditional academic system (diplomas, degrees, certificates and certifications, etc.). In contemporary social structures, in which the traditional credit system is gradually losing importance with respect to the quality and actual level of knowledge, we tend to consider cultural capital as "what you know." *Social* capital is made up of networks of relationships and the consequent ability to mobilize the resources linked to them. Lastly, *symbolic* capital refers to the prestige or status accrued from social recognition; what we might call "reputation" or, by extension, "brand." These different types of capital are partially convertible into each other.
Given the growing importance of the intangible value within production systems, the ability to map, articulate, develop and convert various forms of capital available to individuals and organizations is an increasingly central issue.
In every organization, the management of these different forms of capital makes for a complex and sensitive issue; for an organization like *lettera27* it is even more so. Due to the wide variety of subjects the organization has faced and is facing, many different forms of implicit and explicit knowledge circulate through *lettera27*. The social networking platforms are the ideal and preferred place for the clarification and dissemination of these valuable resources. It is through channels like Twitter and Facebook, in fact, that the *social* and *cultural* capital can convey a significant portion of the *symbolic* capital. In other words, it is on social networks that a variety of projects, involving different stakeholders, subject areas and logics, can be brought together and integrated into a coherent vision in terms of reputation and brand.

After a preliminary analysis of the *lettera27* mediasphere, the focus was placed on Facebook and Twitter. At the moment, in fact, they are the only two social networks that enable effective communication with the relevant public, still very distant from more specialized platforms such as LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube or Flickr.

It is very important to make an observation about the indices put forth in the following pages.

It is clear that the compilation of a periodic report with all the proposed data is too burdensome for small and medium-sized organizations. Monitoring can be achieved through use of special web apps. The most widespread, effective and efficient at the moment is definitely HootSuite (https://hootsuite.com/). Hootsuite allows you to link the accounts of the major social networks and determine what data to monitor, and what kind of report to obtain; it also allows you to incorporate many of the most-used features of the main social media management apps: scheduling, keyword, hashtag, or user search, etc.

4. Performance Indicators and Indices

a. Website Performance Monitoring

Google Analytics is the basic tool for measuring the performance of site traffic. Terms and definitions of the various indicators used by Analytics change relatively often, and important innovations are introduced on a frequent basis. However, the main items to be monitored are relatively stable.

The general reference to analytical details is http://www.google.com/analytics/ (with the administrator account login).

Being contextual tools, you cannot establish performance goals beforehand concerning analytics. The most sensible procedure—in the case of a reorganization such as that which is going on in *lettera27*'s communication area—is to do a monthly snapshot of the performance of the website, and to compare the growth rates from term to term (through the "compare" tool that allows you to make detailed reports).

This allows you to compile the following *analytical indicators*:
A) Site access growth rate, and then define the appropriate development goals (Parameter 1, quantitative);
B) What content generates greater success with the public (Parameter 2, quali-quantitative);
C) Language (Parameter 3, quantitative);
D) Country (Parameter 4, quantitative);
E) Navigation device (Parameter 5, quantitative);
F) Number and type of access through social media (Parameter 6, quantitative);
G) Number and type of access through email (Parameter 7, quantitative);
H) Number and type of access through search engines (Parameter 8, quantitative);
I) It is fundamental to perform a keyword analysis for SEO purposes, in order to identify which keywords landed the public on *Lettera27*'s site (Parameter 9, quali-quantitative).

Through the use of these nine indicators it is possible to construct a diachronic analytical table that monitors developments over time.

b. Twitter Performance Monitoring

Regarding Twitter, the data that define performance are indicated by the number of:
A) Followers (Parameter 10, quantitative);
B) Tweets per day (Parameter 11, quantitative);
C) Retweets (Parameter 12, quali-quantitative, also determined on the basis of followers);
D) Mentions (Parameter 13, quali-quantitative, also determined on the basis of followers);
E) Favorites (Parameter 14, quali-quantitative, also determined on the basis of followers);
F) Direct messages (Parameter 15 quali-quantitative, also determined on the basis of followers).

The qualitative nature of parameters is based on criteria related to Mentions and Retweets, such as:

- Reputation of interacting account: how influential is the engaging account from the point of view of reputation, regardless of its quantitative value related to followers?

- Content significance: a tweet can mention an account or project with various levels of intensity.
- Authoritative recognition denoted by interaction: the tweet can assign different levels of prestige during interaction.

It therefore consists of elements that are particularly susceptible to individual interpretation.

For this, it is essential that the Social Media Manager and Director of Communications (if there are two distinct figures) continually read and remain in constant discussion regarding the signals arriving from the Twittersphere.

In this sense, the index resulting from parameters 10-15 (*Twitter Performance Index*) will have a purely qualitative nature.

c. Facebook Performance Monitoring

With regards to Facebook, the principal quantitative elements are indicated by the number of:

A. Fans (Parameter 16, quantitative);
B. Likes/Posts (Parameter 17, quantitative);
C. Shares (Parameter 18, quantitative);
D. Comments (Parameter 19, quali-quantitative);
E. Posts-per-day (Parameter 20, quali-quantitative).

This rather intuitive data (of which the potentially stimulating capacity of parameter 19 should not be underestimated) is supported by an overview of the interactions on the page that are trackable through the Insights tool.

All this can be summarized in the "Facebook Performance Index," subject to the same caution as Twitter.

5. Methodology of Partner Contact in Social Media

Following are three possible workflows for the implementation of a partnership on social networking channels.

Hypothesis 1: Institutional Contact

- Direct contact between those responsible for communication;
- Definition of common lines of interest;
- Drafting of a formal agreement for the social communication.

Hypothesis 2: Informal Contact

- Contact occurs through social networks (private messages, etc.);
- An informal routine of mentions, retweets, interactions, etc., is established;
- Formalizing a possible partnership can be considered at a later time.

Hypothesis 3: Sponsored Influencing

- Possibly establishing and remaining in constant contact with a pool of bloggers, offering paid expenses. It is important that the nature of the relationship between bloggers and *lettera27* is a theme in the articles, with transparency being absolute and key within the community.

6. Media Partnership

Media partnership is a form of cooperation between an organization and an institution that operates in a traditional media area or linked to new media; the goal of the collaboration is to build visibility, credibility and increase the reputation of one or both parties.

In order to make the most of the various forms of capital embedded in third-sector organizations, media partnerships should not be intended as a form of free or low-cost advertising nor as simple bulletin boards to showcase events or activities. In contrast, they should be regarded as a valuable opportunity for the emergence of the implied wealth hidden in the culture of organizations and their stakeholders.

In fact, it is this type of content that may be more attractive to media partners that possibly have the goal of consolidating relationships with existing audiences related to the areas in which the organization operates, or strengthening their catchment area to connect with new audiences.

To begin, it is necessary to organize a mapping of potential media partners on the basis of the topics regularly dealt with, their potential development lines, prestige and user base.

Before starting negotiations for the media partnership be sure to have a clear idea of what you want to offer and what you can get in return, bearing in mind that a profitable relationship is one in which the feedback among the organizations, contents and audiences is continuous and constantly re-tuned.

Here are some examples of content that can be offered to media partners:

- Multimedia content produced exclusively and directly by the organization (images, text, video, audio);
- Multimedia content produced exclusively by the organization's supporting networks and stakeholders;
- Exchanges of visibility for specific communication materials both online (banners, newsletters) and offline (flyers, posters, etc.)

7. Final Recommendations

Following are a few final recommendations relative to *lettera27*'s placement on 2.0 channels.

1) *lettera27* must be positioned as a consistent, reliable and significant actor on the various channels, through constant and close interaction with the already influential actors and stakeholders; the relevance of this interaction is characterized more in the sense of keywords and scope than in that of the relevance of content (in other words, it makes more sense to invest resources in covering diversified fields than in the pinpointing of the specific content produced within those fields). Best practice is to maximize the number of re-tweets and reposts on different channels.

2) Building *lettera27*'s credibility as a producer of content is a long and complex task. While this activity is being carried out on the editorial point of view, it is more effective and efficient to be branded by third parties as aggregators of content. In this sense, a constant renewal and sharing of news and posts from those who are already influential or otherwise relevant to the organization (the actors referred to as "relevant" in the mapping) serves the purpose perfectly.

3) The positioning that *lettera27* pursues is of a radically innovative nature, placing itself at the crossroads between very different worlds in which communication practices, strategies, and toolkits are immeasurably different. It is just this incommensurability that makes the traditional benchmark tool useless from a methodological point of view, since there is no clear evidence on what it makes sense to compare, and how and why.

4) The suggested strategy is therefore to refer to the three indices and 20 parameters presented, using the tools contained in these guidelines.

5) The fine-tuning of the 2.0 communication can take place on a monthly basis, then reviewing the adopted strategies on a six-month basis. Tools are recommended to be as concise as possible (in this sense, the parameters and indices are considered to be more like markers: a continual monthly mapping would take an inordinate amount of resources).

6) As a final recommendation, it should be noted that in addition to the already-delineated criteria of coherence, authority and significance, 2.0 communication is based on elements that are quite far from the traditional, such as speed, personalization of content, and the non-separation between the organization's accumulated cognitive capital and communication.

The literature clearly indicates that any attempt at excessive bureaucracy and vertical separation of work in social media exposes the organization to resource overload, little credibility among its stakeholders, and the risk of ineffective management of crisis situations.

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