

World of social media opens new doors

Posts, tweets and updates are becoming the language of business

Social media isn't just for socializing. It's a tool for organizations and businesses to better serve their clients, spread their message and share their success stories, all while capitalizing on limitless networking opportunities.

Thanks to social media, the **AIDS Council of Northeastern New York** has seen heightened awareness of its organization and increased attendance at its events, according to Richard Nacy, director of development and marketing.

The not-for-profit human services agency provides services to people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS and educates people on prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS, covering a 15-county region from Columbia County to the Canadian border.

The AIDS Council currently uses a blog, a Facebook page and a Twitter account — all of which are linked — to publicize upcoming testing events and fundraisers, according to Malissa Pilette-McClenon, marketing coordinator.

“One-fifth of our unique Web site traffic comes from a social marketing account,” she said. “We have been promoting a public service announcement aimed at teens, almost exclusively through social marketing, and we've received more than 80,000 hits on www.thepriceisyourlife.com in less than two months.”

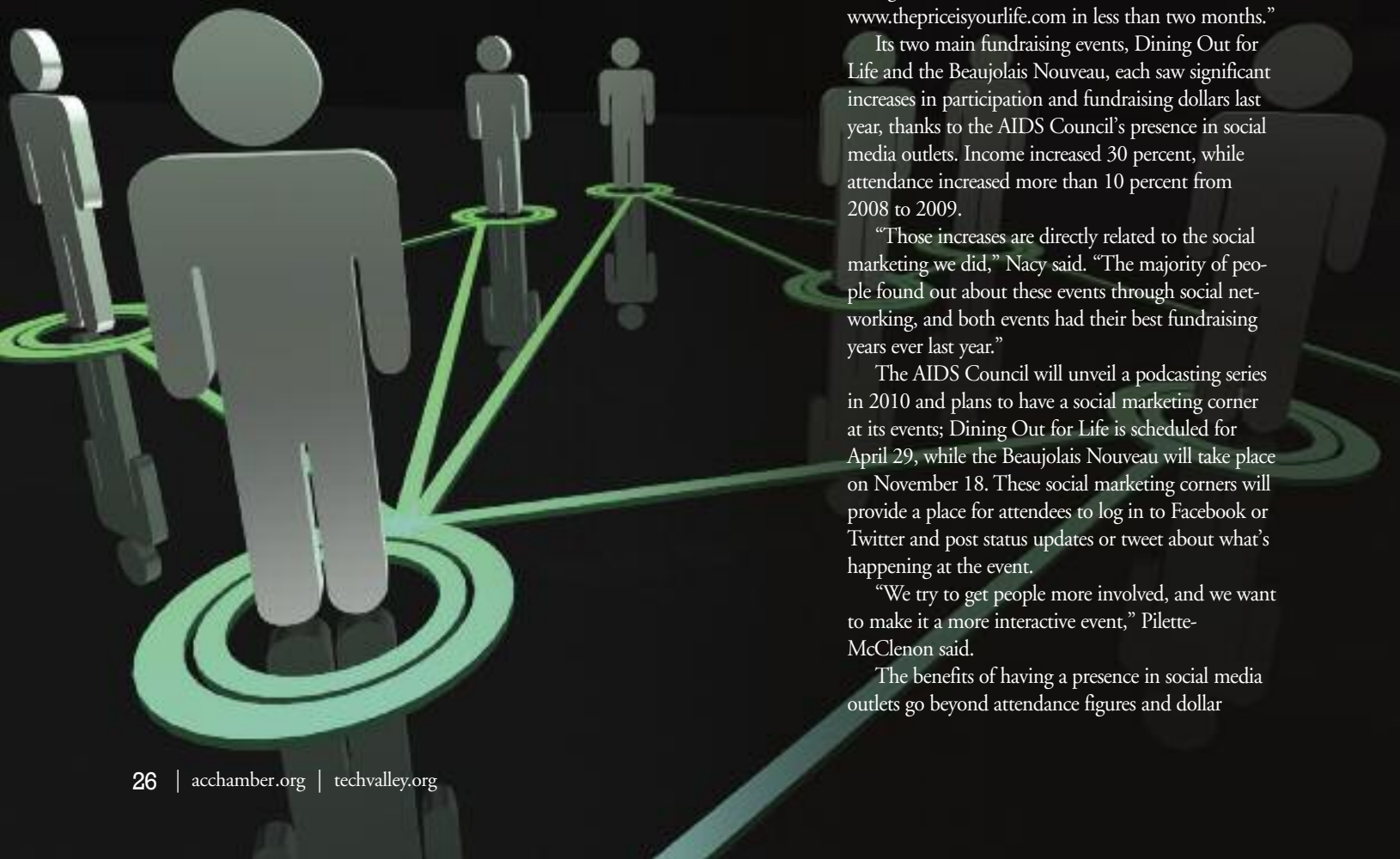
Its two main fundraising events, Dining Out for Life and the Beaujolais Nouveau, each saw significant increases in participation and fundraising dollars last year, thanks to the AIDS Council's presence in social media outlets. Income increased 30 percent, while attendance increased more than 10 percent from 2008 to 2009.

“Those increases are directly related to the social marketing we did,” Nacy said. “The majority of people found out about these events through social networking, and both events had their best fundraising years ever last year.”

The AIDS Council will unveil a podcasting series in 2010 and plans to have a social marketing corner at its events; Dining Out for Life is scheduled for April 29, while the Beaujolais Nouveau will take place on November 18. These social marketing corners will provide a place for attendees to log in to Facebook or Twitter and post status updates or tweet about what's happening at the event.

“We try to get people more involved, and we want to make it a more interactive event,” Pilette-McClenon said.

The benefits of having a presence in social media outlets go beyond attendance figures and dollar





The AIDS Council has seen increases in event participation and fundraising, thanks to social networking

amounts. “When we’re in the community, we’re seeing more people who tell us they’ve seen our Facebook page and they’ve become ‘fans’ of our organization,” Pilette-McClenon said. “I think people want to feel more involved in the places where they’re giving money. Twitter and Facebook allow them to feel like they have a presence in the organization, and they’re helping to craft how their money is used.”

Constant contact

Robert L. Serenka, Attorney at Law, PLLC, remarked that having a presence on Facebook and other social media outlets has indirectly helped attract new clients to his practice.

“In terms of networking, the only way to be in the right place at the right time is to be every place, every time,” he said. “Social media has broad reach. It’s not very deep, but it’s wide, and you’re in front of people all the time.”

As an attorney, Serenka can advertise his practice, but he can’t solicit potential clients. The beauty of Facebook is that he can promote himself and his outside interests without delving too deeply into his work.

“Social media makes you more three-dimensional, particularly people who own their own businesses,” he said. “It makes you more of a person. While you’re also the brand, it gives people a sense that there’s more to you than just what you can do for them. There’s more to you than what you do for a living.”

Serenka uses Facebook to publicize his upcoming speaking engagements but he tries to avoid discussing his business and keeps his posts friendly and light; an avid cook, he often posts dishes he’s preparing or chats about culinary topics.

“I don’t talk about my business,” he said. “I don’t look at Facebook as a marketing or sales tool. It’s another way to be present. Social media is nothing more than another way of establishing relationships.”

Social media can have its drawbacks if people use it as a forum to get personal or vent their frustrations, but if the dialogue remains civil, the benefits are far greater.

“You want to be optimistic and put your best face forward,” Serenka said. “If people post comments after what you’ve posted, that generates interest. Even if people aren’t responding, they’re still on Facebook, and your presence adds another whole dimension to your public image. People are interested in other people, they want to work with people they know, and social marketing is just another way of being part of the community.”

(www.twitter.com/cotton_hill), individual LinkedIn accounts and a blog, Cotton Hill Studios manages and maintains its messages in various formats on a daily basis.

“I think you really have to make a commitment to social media in order for it to be of any benefit, and you have to define how you, as a business, want to manage your social media accounts,” Rettig said. “Is there one person that writes for the company under the company’s name, or does each employee have an individual account that references their workplace? Does everyone blog individually, or is there just one official company blog? What about the approval process and the consistency of the corporate message? These are all questions that should be addressed when you plan your social media strategy.”

When Cotton Hill Studios works on a project for a client, they tweet about it — with



Cotton Hill Studios has committed to social media on several fronts, including Facebook

Media is the message

Cotton Hill Studios, Inc. has been utilizing social media for well over a year, and it has positively impacted its work and how the company conducts business.

“Since we’ve embraced social media, our listenership numbers have increased for our podcasts, we’ve increased awareness of the studio, we’ve engaged in conversation via our blogs and booked clients as a direct result of social media,” said Ray Rettig, president.

With a Web site, a Facebook fan page (www.facebook.com/cottonhillstudios), a Twitter account

the client’s consent — and post it on Cotton Hill’s Facebook page. “This helps increase awareness of the project and can give more visibility to the client,” Rettig said. “Also, anyone that does an Internet search for this particular client may come across our tweet or posting.”

Cotton Hill Studios has Google alerts set up to notify them if any posts about the company come across the Internet, such as this *Visions* article.

“When this article publishes, I will tweet about it, put it on our Facebook page and hopefully that will help drive people to the Chamber’s Web site,” Rettig said. “One of the main purposes of social media is to engage people in conversation. Interactivity and interchange is a must.” ●