How to spread your message online?

There is an overwhelming range of social media – facebook, youtube, twitter and lots of other sites that make the internet an exciting space where many people like to spend a lot of their time. Often you come across videos on social issues, people forward links to interesting articles, or you are asked to give your opinion on political affairs… So it is very possible that your group will also want to use social media for their campaign. We don’t want to tell you every advantage and disadvantage of every social online platform here, but rather give some guiding questions and tips to think about when you discuss possible online campaign strategies with your group.

Don’t think about all this too early in the planning!
Many people like things like facebook so much that they start thinking about facebook pages before they even know what their campaign should be about. Media should be a way of achieving your aim and objectives; it is not an aim in itself!

What is your aim?
First of all, you need to know clearly what you want to achieve. Do you want to change behaviour? Do you want to influence decisions? When you know what final outcome you want to see, you can define some ‘smaller step’ - objectives that will help you to get there: Give people examples of how they can change their behaviour, get support, inform them about the reasons for your campaign etc.

Define your audience.
You might have two different types of audience – the people who can make the change that you want to see (for example members of parliament who decide on a law on emission reductions, or people who you want to change their behaviour) and the people who can support your cause (for example people who can help you to convince the members of parliament, who can join your demonstrations and provide other support).

Which media formats do they follow?
The politicians who will decide on the emission reduction law might have facebook pages and twitter accounts, but may not be online very often. And if you want everyone in your town to stop driving cars, you might better reach older people through the local newspaper and not through the internet.

Which social media do they use?
If you know that your audience uses social media, your next step is to find out which. Internet geeks might tell you that you need your own blog, a twitter account, a youtube channel, a facebook page and many other things. But have the people you want to reach ever been on twitter? Do they use facebook or rather the national equivalent? Do they even know what a blog is? Don’t waste your energy on things that no one will ever see.

Create a call to action.
Again: Media is not an aim in itself. You need to know what you want to achieve with your facebook page or twitter account. ‘Raising awareness’ doesn’t create change, so it’s not enough that people know that your group and your aim exist. You should have a ‘call to action’, something easy they can do to help you achieve your aim. Lead them to a ready-to-use text for a letter to politicians, invite them to your public action in front of the parliament, let them participate in a poll on the emission law that you can then show to the members of parliament.

Update it.
When you have decided that your audience is easy to reach in social media, and when you have a call for action, you need to work very regularly on updating it. Social media is only useful if it’s really a living space, if people comment on posts, spread information or participate in your poll. So you should post your call again and again, find more friends or followers who you can invite and publish new actions to get support almost every day.

Zane, Liepajas Jaunie Vanagi (Latvia)

In Latvia many people don’t know anything about this topic and a ‘green lifestyle’ is really not popular. I really recommend that you make personal contact when you have a message to tell. Then you get full attention from them and they will believe you more.