



Social-media is becoming ever more present throughout the Friends of the Earth network (even in the FoEE office!). But have we considered its effectiveness; its relevance for the FoEE network; and is there anything we should know before we jump right in?

Below, FoEE's Antoine Simon chats through the ether with Jon Worth, a specialist in social-media, and one of the most influential bloggers in the EU sphere, to answer exactly that.

Network News Interview: Jon Worth

How to be a modern NGO in the new Social Media World?

What attracts you to the world of social-media?

I've been designing websites for more than a decade, and as part of that I always need to be aware of the latest trends and what's new. So when Facebook, Twitter and other social media have become popular I've been an early adopter and worked out ways to use social media personally and professionally. It's not all perfect – some services I do not use – but I am very keen on how social media can connect people, connect citizens and politicians, and how it is so different from the mainstream broadcast media.

What are your thoughts on its role and importance in comparison to conventional media?

Social media is much more participatory than the mainstream media. There are ways – via letters or audiences – to participate in television, radio or newspapers, but the process is essentially one way. With social media

everyone can become a contributor, and the old hierarchical structures are broken.

Clearly there is a long way to go before the total reach of social media matches the mainstream media, but with – for example – more than 40% of the UK population on Facebook social media is no longer a narrow, geeky pursuit.

“The non-hierarchical nature of social media and Friends of the Earth are a perfect match.”

What role do you see social-media playing for organizations like those in the Friends of the Earth network?

The very nature of Friends of the Earth is to push the boundaries of what is possible, to innovate, to look forward, to shake the establishment. The non-hierarchical nature of social media and

Friends of the Earth are a perfect match. The main everyday uses of social media can be to reach audiences that cannot be reached via the mainstream media, to strengthen networks of activists via blogs and Twitter, and to amplify the messages Friends of the Earth wishes to communicate during the down times when the mainstream media is not covering environmental questions as much as it once did.

What recommendations would you give for an organisation about to branch out into the work of social-media?

The key issue is to make the most of limited time and staffing resources. For this reason text and image based social media (i.e. blogs, Twitter, Facebook) are a better starting point than audio or video – the latter are too likely to require a large time investment before they can be successful. Secondly work out to what extent social media engagement can be personalised. Blogs and Facebook work better when it is clear

who the author is, while Twitter can also work well in organisational contexts. Lastly try to set some clear objectives for social media work – what do you want to achieve? How? By when? Then keep those objectives in mind all the time.

With (often) manic working environments, where/when do you think social-media is an efficient use of time for NGOs?

Effective use of social media need not be especially time consuming, especially if responsibility for it is decentralised across an organisation. Social media should not simply be the responsibility of comms teams. Beyond that, time can be saved through the efficient use of RSS to monitor what is going on online, mail rules to streamline e-mail use, and some of this time re-invested in social media. Further the same information – a blog entry for example – can be be tweeted, posted to a Facebook page for example, to avoid duplication of effort.

Also look at it the other way: there is a price to **not** being present in social media, in terms of it leaving an organisation open to attack on its reputation, or simply that other organisations better attract supporters than the organisation that is slow to use social media does.

How do you see social-media developing in the future?

We have the network for friends (Facebook), we have the network for quick interaction between strangers in the same sector (Twitter), and we have the system for longer pieces among obsessives about any issue (blogs). What will come next?

The main developments are in geo location services – ways of connecting with people and information on the basis of where you are and what is around you. Services like Foursquare and Layar

are going to grow strongly into the future, also as smart phones become more prevalent.

“Set clear objectives for social media work – what do you want to achieve? How? By when?”

Do you have any practical tips or tools for those already active?

Be decisive and have a clear-out once in a while. Review whether you follow the right people on Twitter, purge Facebook friends who have simply become annoying, and re-assess the RSS feeds that you read. This will give you a new lease of life in social media.

One of your social-media highpoints? i.e. when it has had an unexpected or successful outcome?

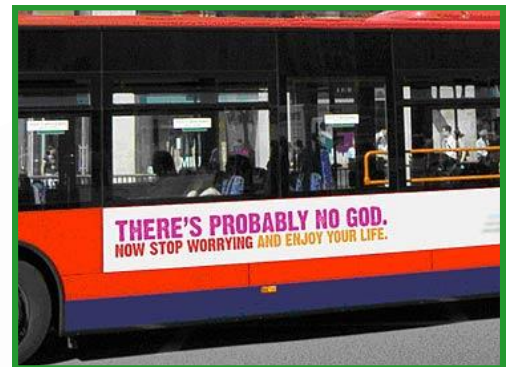
Undoubtedly the Atheist Bus Campaign – it is one of the most unlikely social media success stories.

I blogged about an idea off the website of The Guardian stating that atheists ought to pool money together to pay for advertisements on buses.

More bloggers followed my lead, drawing the attention of Richard Dawkins to the issue. The mainstream media then followed – criticizing atheists for being too badly organised – and then we really started to plan.

With a blog style website, Facebook page and Twitter account (tweeting as if it were a bus writing – humour works in social media) we raised £100000 (€120000) in 4 days, and finished up with £154000, one of the largest online fundraising efforts in the UK, and all started among bloggers. Equivalent campaigns have then taken place across Europe and beyond.

More on why the campaign worked can be found here www.jonworth.eu/atheist-bus-why-did-it-work



More about Jon Worth:

Jon Worth is founder and partner in techPolitics LLP, a small London-based web agency dedicated to developing online strategies and websites for politicians and political campaigns. In a personal capacity, Jon has been blogging about European Union politics, and the influence of the internet on European political systems for the past 5 years.

PR firm Waggener Edstrom ranked www.jonworth.eu as the 5th most influential EU blog in June 2010. The networks created thanks to blogging have led to the creation of the not-for-profit EU blogging aggregator www.bloggingportal.eu. The blog is read and cited by Commissioners, MEPs and Brussels based journalists.

You can follow him both on www.jonworth.eu and twitter.com/jonworth.