

## The Ten Commandments of MySpace Advocacy

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MySpace has been attracting a lot of interest in the nonprofit world lately, and understandably so: it's the largest and fastest-growing online social network. The site claims 100 million registered users, many of whom spend more time on MySpace than on any other website. Many of your online supporters are probably already using MySpace.

But if engaging your supporters online is part of your job description, you've probably greeted this buzz with a few clear-eyed questions: Can this stuff really facilitate advocacy or volunteerism? Can it build my list? Can it raise money? Isn't it all 13-year-olds?

It's true that the demographic does skew much younger than that of most nonprofits and political campaigns, but there is strong evidence that MySpace is getting "older". An October, 2006 [study](#) by ComScore found that more than half of MySpace's users are 35 and older. These users seem to be driving MySpace's recent population boom.

There's a lot you can do on MySpace, and some you can't. If you're peering over the edge, here are a few things to keep in mind about jumping into the wonderful world of campaigning on MySpace, with all its possibilities and pitfalls.

### Thou shall:

#### 1. Decide if MySpace is the right network for your organization.

- Pick MySpace because you want to engage young people. Don't pick it just because it's big. Other networks may be smaller but more effective. TechSoup has a great [article](#) on using different types of social networks.
- Most organizations using social networks maintain a presence on more than one site, but remember that undertaking this kind of project will take considerable staff resources.
- Do you have someone around who already has experience with MySpace? A young staffer? An intern? Your niece? Get them involved, their experience will be a big help.

#### 2. Prepare to lose control.

- You can't possibly vet every word of every person's profile who wants to become your friend. If you or your lawyers are not comfortable with the fact that you're going to lose some control over content, MySpace probably isn't right for you.
- On MySpace, friends can post "comments" on your page. You can set MySpace to either post these comments automatically or to require your approval before doing so. If you choose the latter option, make sure you're reviewing and accepting (or rejecting) new comments quickly—your new friends won't like it if it takes two days for their comment to show up.

#### 3. Know that your MySpace efforts may not pay-off right away.

- Email advocacy and fundraising provide immediate gratification in terms of actions taken or dollars raised; success on MySpace is measured in terms of how many friends you make. Converting those friends to activists and/or donors will likely be a long-term process.

#### 4. Look at who's already talking about your organization on MySpace, if anyone.

- Are there MySpace “groups”? Fake profiles set up by supporters? Blog postings?
- Are there people talking about your work on other social networks? If so, putting your energy into building your presence on MySpace may not be as effective as concentrating on this other network.

**5. Make sure your site is ready before you tell anyone about it.**

- A lot of your list members may “friend” you early on and then not look at your page much after that so it’s best to be prepared to wow them – first impressions do matter.
- MySpace can sometimes do tricky things to the code you try to use. It’s a good idea to set up a dummy account to test your layout before you make your changes live.
- Control what your organization will look like on other people’s friend lists—pick a great picture and title that will show up on your friends’ pages.

**6. Post your edgiest, most viral content.**

- Social networks really work best when people are passing content around. Think of your MySpace page as a place to test out ideas that you think people will want to be associated with. This could be as simple as a great profile name or as involved as a video or flash animation. If it doesn’t make you think “Cool!” then it’s probably not viral.
- You may have better luck with a page based on a specific campaign or “gimmick” than a general page plugging your organization.
- If you have a “personality” as part of your campaign—a candidate, a character, a target, an animal—you might want to set up a “fake” profile for them.
- You can post videos and music on MySpace. If you have these, post them.

**7. Figure out which of your supporters are on MySpace already, and ask them to be your first friends!**

- If you survey your members, find out which of them have MySpace profiles.
- Send them an email asking them to become your friend—you can expect a response rate typical of your best action alerts.
- The normal process for becoming a friend on MySpace is that you visit a person’s MySpace page and click on the appropriate link to add them as a friend. But don’t try using this link in a MySpace bulletin—MySpace will strip out the code, replacing it with a link to the general MySpace.com homepage.
- MySpace has a feature where you can upload your personal address book, send your contacts a “friend request” through the MySpace system, and enable them to automatically “friend” you. You’d think this would be a great way to get your current listmembers to be your “friends” on MySpace, right? *Only if you have a tiny list.* MySpace won’t let you import more than 90 of these email addresses at a given time...

**8. Continue communicating with your MySpace friends.**

- Emails to your current listmembers whom you know are on MySpace are more effective than any of the methods of communication available to you through MySpace (bulletins, which go to all your friends, MySpace blogs, and MySpace “Mail”).
- Nonetheless, encourage people to subscribe to your MySpace blog—if their email notifications are “on,” they’ll know every time you put up a new posting.
- Regularly update your site with new content reflecting whatever issues you’re working on.

**9. Devote staff time to making your MySpace page a success.**

- You will need to assign a staff person to regularly accept friend requests, post comments on other people's pages, and invite other people to become friends. Otherwise, your MySpace page will languish.
- There are a number of [shady third-party programs](#) that will automatically send out and accept friend requests, post comments, and do other things you might want an intern to do. These programs amount to spamming, and they violate MySpace's terms and conditions. Remember, MySpace can take down your profile anytime it wants, and it would be sad to lose all those great activists.

**10. Funnel users to your organizational website to build your email list.**

- Communicating on MySpace is great but you should always be trying to get your new friends onto your organizational email list. Only then will you be able to move from passive to direct communication with them.
- Put prominent, easy action links on your MySpace profile to help convert people who visit your MySpace page into email list members, not just MySpace friends.
- Make sure to keep track of who comes into your system through your MySpace profile, and tailor your messages to them accordingly whenever possible.

Good luck! May you make more friends than you do mistakes...