

Steps to Organizing an Activism Campaign on Facebook

Step 1: Understand Your Intent

What are your initial goals for this group? These goals will change as group members begin to take ownership and shape efforts, but having an initial vision is an important part of communicating to others why they should join in the first place. Putting these goals into clear and concise words at the top of the group page is vital.

Step 2: Create the Group and Build an Active Base

Create the group and get people involved. This means inviting everyone you know to join the group, provoking thought conversation on the group wall, and ultimately creating an active environment. Utilize the energy of your new members by asking them to help you recruit. Begin to think about who might help you moderate the group once it starts to grow. Activity and growth are the primary goals during this stage.

Step 3: Begin Digital Action

Once your group is somewhat sizeable start collectively orchestrating digital action. This could involve having people spread the word among family and friends, blog, collect images and media, or promote awareness through social media sites such as Digg (<http://www.digg.com>) or Reddit (<http://www.reddit.com>). The actions that make the most sense will depend on your intent and the context.

The important part is to keep people excited and involved. This would also be a good time to recruit members to help create an external site.

Step 4: Create an External Site

Facebook wasn't created with activism in mind and information will not be presented in a way conducive to your effort (meaning that the content will be difficult to navigate). Furthermore, not everybody has a Facebook account. For these reasons it is a good idea to create an external site to mirror the information provided in the Facebook group. You can also archive content in a meaningful way, attract participants outside of Facebook, and create specialized tools and interfaces that don't exist on Facebook.

Step 5: Contact Existing Activist Organizations

If you are looking to make a genuine impact it makes sense to work with those who have an established track record offline. Existing advocacy groups with a common cause will be willing to donate time, knowledge, and possibly even manpower/organizational assistance to your group's efforts. By creating these relationships you visibly expand the scope of your movement and increase the odds of success.

Step 6: Begin Real-World Action

Assuming your intent is to have a real impact, now is the time to get started. Since Facebook is global you probably have people around the world with a wide variety of talents. Take advantage of this. Propose the large goal such as "We want to hold a day of global protests on October 15th" or "We want to get flyers posted in every major U.S. city by the end of the month" and help the group run with it. Make sure your moderators somehow elevate any ideas with potential. The key is to be fluid and flexible: ideally the bulk of the organization is bottom up (i.e. powered by from the group members) with seeds being planted from the top (you). Make sure you have audio/video/photo records of any events that happen!

Step 7: Generate Media Support

Once your group has done something newsworthy, get it in the news. Media interest will be proportional to how journalists feel about the group's topic and/or the significance of your efforts. Ask group members to contact local radio and TV stations and newspapers to promote your story. Help by having participants create a list of relevant local media contacts and build targeted media packets (i.e. collections of images/video from specific locations). Use the Internet as well. Have people blog about the events and submit content about the group efforts to social media sites.

Step 8: Keep on Going

If you can attract media attention your group will probably flourish, if not, then at least you got your message out and people are involved. From here you just continue to plan, organize, act, and increase the group's network of members and contacts. The general model for an activism campaign is: reflect > plan > act > reflect > plan > act.... This is also true of Facebook activism. First, think about the goal of your campaign, the decision-makers it is trying to persuade, and who your allies and opposition are. Next, plan an action and carry out that action. Then reflect on the success of that action and plan another action which builds on the first. This pattern continues until you achieve your goal.

Advice for Your Facebook Campaign

DO promote the external site AND the Facebook group If people who use Facebook hear about your efforts it will be easy for them to check out the group. On the other hand, there are plenty of non-Facebook users out there. Both of these outlets are important to promoting your cause and attracting as many members as possible.

DON'T assume that people are all using the external site or the Facebook group They aren't. You want to mirror information in both places at all times. Keep in mind that getting group members to use an external site is not necessarily easy to do. Only a small fraction of Facebook users will become active on the other site.

DO use the "Recent News" section of your Facebook group wisely As a group administrator you will want to provide just the right amount of information in the "recent news" area of your group page. This is an area free of spam and user-generated content, where you are in complete control of the message. You will want to put the most important information here, but don't put up too much, as people will get bored and navigate elsewhere. For instance, do not post the total list of all 150 events. Instead, post the next 5 upcoming events and link to an external page where users can learn about the others.

DON'T create multiple groups for the same effort Facebook groups generally benefit from the network effect. The more users there are in the group, the more value each member gets from being in the group. Spreading membership across multiple groups will just make it more difficult to share important information and will lower the ability for individuals to coordinate naturally. If you see another group organizing around the same cause, then either merge with them or get them to merge with you.

DO work closely with established activist organizations The activist groups you get in touch with will prove invaluable as you try to effectively make the jump from a digital venue to the real world.

DON'T spam your members If members get more than one or two e-mails a month they will leave. Provide regular updates, but do so passively by posting on the group's "Recent News" section and the external site. Rely on actively messaging members only for very important announcements, and keep these messages short and to the point.

DO work every angle to get news media attention Getting media support will help you achieve your goal by highlighting the group and the cause. This means writing press releases (short news article presenting the facts of your case, along with your contact information) and sending them to members of the TV, radio, and print media who would be most likely to cover your story and who list their professional e-mail addresses online.

DON'T try to restrict planning to a few members This is, by definition, a group effort. Every member of the group will bring some type of experience and skill to the table and it would be a terrible thing to waste. Organizing worldwide action is simply too large a task for a couple of people to do.

