How to Use Hashtags to Promote Your Cause

Hashtags. On social you see them everywhere. They’ve even made their way to television commercials and billboards.

What began as an organic, grassroots custom has turned into A REALLY BIG DEAL in almost every social network. Entire services and tools have sprung up in response to the ever-widening use of hashtags in modern social communication.

HASHTAG BENEFITS
Hashtags have two major benefits:

1. GET FOUND – Want to jump in to a relevant conversation on Twitter? Attract followers on Instagram? Use well-established hashtags. They help your content and posts get found by people who are searching for that hashtag. Use a popular hashtag in your post and you’re more apt to get comments, clicks and shares.

2. FIND – Where are all the good conversations and content at? Find the hashtags that are meaningful to your interests – like #humanrights or #fairelections – and you’ll tap a powerful vein of conversation and learning. Do a persistent and regular search for a popular industry hashtag – #fundraising for example – and you have access to a pure, topical news stream.

CONVERSATION & ENGAGEMENT
Conversations about you, your issues, your influencers, are already happening on social networks. Better to know them and join in. Hashtags can help you with that.

Start by following a hashtag you know is relevant to your nonprofit - #autism, #diabetes, or #detroit for example. This is your gateway hashtag.

Observe who uses it and what other hashtags are commonly used with it. Add to your collection of hashtags to monitor.

Twitter Advanced Search is your friend here. Try these 3 searches to help you hunt down hashtags and find relevant people and conversations:
1. **Photos & Videos** - Need media? Sort your search by tweets containing photos & videos
2. **Places** - Find local or regional prospects and conversations near a particular place
3. **Question** - Find tweets that ask a question (so you can provide information and help)

Another great hashtag research tool is [Google+ Explore](https://google.com). Plunk in a hashtag and it will not only deliver posts with that hashtag but a host other relevant hashtags to explore plus trending topics.

Use a tool like [Hootsuite](www.hootsuite.com) or [Tweetdeck](www.tweetdeck.com) to monitor the hashtags in streams. It’s like putting a net out in the ocean where you know the fish will be. You don’t have to monitor the net 24/7, just check every once in a while to see what kinds of conversations you’ve caught.

Here’s list of popular hashtags used by nonprofits:

- #activism
- #advocacy
- #charity
- #charitytuesday
- #csr – corporate social responsibility
- #donate
- #foundations
- #fundraising
- #grant
- #grants
- #grantwriting
- #ngo – nongovernmental organization
- #nonprofit
- #nonprofits
- #npcons – nonprofit consultants
- #np-tech – nonprofit tech
- #philanthropy
- #sm4sg – social media for social good
- #sm4np – social medis for nonprofits
- #socent – social entrepreneur or social enterprise
- #video4change
- #volunteer
- #volunteers
ADVOCACY, AWARENESS & FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS
Running a campaign with a social component? Hashtag it. From advocacy to awareness to fundraising campaigns, hashtags help you promote and track a campaign throughout channels, especially online channels.

And hashtags don’t have to be mere afterthoughts or adjuncts to a campaign. Hashtags can be the star, a way to participate in a campaign and meet its goal. Tweet-a-thons ask followers to tweet a hashtag to raise funds from a matching donor. Pin-to-give campaigns on Pinterest operate in much the same way - repin an image with a hashtag to raise funds for a cause.

Here are 6 tips for using hashtags for campaigns:

1. Shorter is better
2. Make it easy to remember
3. Put it on everything - graphics, tweets, Facebook posts, share language, blog posts
4. Pair your campaign hashtag with a more popular and relevant hashtag to boost reach
5. Echo and amplify support and progress throughout the campaign, i.e. “we’re almost there” or “thanks to @xyzSupporter for supporting our campaign”
6. Use a tool like Tagboard to track the hashtag across social media networks.

TRY A TWITTER CHAT
Another great use of hashtags is the Twitter chat – a conversation that happens on Twitter that’s focused within a certain time (usually 1-2 hour slot), on a specific topic and by a specific person.

Twitter chats often occur on a regular schedule (once a week, twice a month, etc.). Once you learn the hashtag for the chat, you can use a tool such as Twubs (specifically designed for Twitter chats) to view the chat and participate in the conversation in real time.

Here are some popular nonprofit Twitter chats:
• #nptalk – nonprofit talk (weekly Wednesdays, 3-4pm EST)
• #ynpchat – young nonprofit professionals (first Wednesday of the month, 4-5pm EST)
• #npcons – nonprofit consultants (third Tuesday of the month, 4-5pm EST)
• #socentchant – social entrepreneurs (first Wednesday of the month, 4-6pm EST)
• #smNPchat – small nonprofits (every other Friday, 12-1pm EST)

EMBRACE THE SECOND SCREEN
Twitter in particular is the second screen of choice for supporters watching television shows and live events like a concert or a big political speech.
Fan of #GameofThrones, #WalkingDead, #ModernFamily or #DancingWithTheStars? Did you watch #Oscars2014 or #MTVMovieAwards? Thousands of people are already tweeting and posting about these shows and events. Can you make a natural tie-in to the people, cultural issues and topics in these shows? Know and use the hashtag(s) associated with these events to jump into the conversation, make your case and increase your reach.

**HASHTAG TOOLS**

- [Hashtagify](#) (Twitter only) - research related hashtags, popularity of hashtags and influencers of that hashtag
- [Tagboard](#) - track your hashtag across social networks
- [Hashtracking](#) (Twitter only) - research hashtag volume and monitor your hashtags across networks
- [Trends Map](#) (Twitter only) - Real-time local Twitter trends
- Twitter Trending Topics (look on the Twitter home page)
- [Iconosquare](#) (Instagram) - Explore top hashtags on Instagram
- [Google+ Explore](#) (Google+ only)