

# Flocking Together

With many nonprofits, Twitter, Facebook and other social media tools are finding a welcome reception.

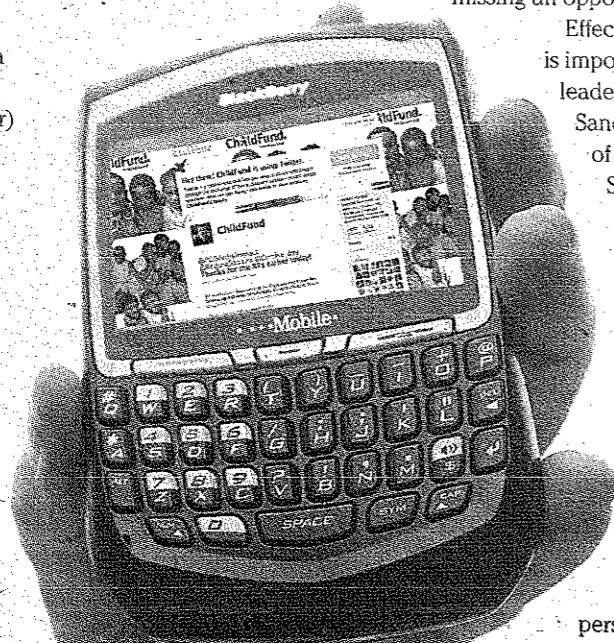
BY MEGAN WILSON

In a year when business plans have needed imagination and ingenuity, nonprofits have found that social media tools are ideal for attracting people to their causes without maxing money or staffs.

Social media include a range of strategies and online tools that bring people together, such as Facebook and Twitter. And for the most part it's low-to no-cost, making it a good match for nonprofits, says Jonah Holland, public relations and marketing coordinator for Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. "Nonprofits can convey passion and voice to a large audience without a lot of staffing resources," she says. "It's a really worthwhile investment."

Holland uses Twitter (@lewisginter) to answer basic customer-service questions such as inquires about admissions and operating hours. She also links to photos she's taken, such as butterflies at the garden's special exhibit. Most importantly, though, she

*Cynthia Price, director of communications at ChildFund, recently ran a successful campaign using Twitter.*



shares her passion with people who may never have heard of Lewis Ginter, and her "followers" share a bit of themselves. This two-way communication has become integral to many nonprofit marketing plans in Richmond.

Signaling that Richmond nonprofits may be forerunners in the national adoption of social media, the University of Richmond's Jepson School of Leadership Studies served as host of a July 24 conference, "Strategic Leadership and Social Media for Social Good." More than 60 percent of those who attended were leaders of area nonprofits — the social-media oblivious and specialists alike.

One of the draws was Gradon Tripp, founder of Boston-based Social Media for Social Change — a keynote speaker at the conference. "The conversation is so important," Tripp says. "If you are at a party, someone says something to you, you don't walk away. If you don't respond to them, you are killing the conversation and missing an opportunity."

Effective listening is important for good leadership, says Sandra Peart, dean of UR's Jepson School of Leadership Studies. "As listeners we can now hear those voices more readily than we used to," she says. "There is flattening on both sides. The formal leader, the person in charge, can do a lot more things than he or she used to. The person on other side, who is not in a formal leadership role, is in the position to say what's important by being on the ground and can so influence change."

While the marketing efforts are usually left to the communications and marketing departments of organizations, the social media era has forced leaders to become involved, says Ryan Smartt, director of ConnectRichmond.

Groups such as his typically have just a handful of people who fill many roles for organizations, Smartt says — from behind the scenes to the face of the nonprofit. "They have

their hands on everything," he says. "It makes more sense [to have] that person being the social media guru."

Other nonprofits have more resources and can assign someone on the team to specifically handle the social media. The Christian Children's Fund, which became ChildFund International July 1, recently hired someone to take care of social media activities as a community manager.

To generate awareness about the nonprofit's new identity as ChildFund, Director of Communications Cynthia Price launched a 17-day Twitter campaign, challenging people to follow the organization. For every 200 followers ChildFund accrued, the nonprofit would donate agricultural gifts to someone in need through its Gifts of Love and Hope campaign.

"We weren't concerned about donations, though that is what we do," Price says, "but we wanted to gain visibility. Within a day, we had a couple hundred followers."

Compared with its former strategies in social media, Price says ChildFund has gained more followers in a recent week than it had during the past nine months.

ChildFund is also sending Flip cameras to each family that receives an agricultural gift, such as a goat, so that their social media community can see the impact of their participation. Effective nonprofit communications always involve stories that show a mission at work, she says. Social media are especially useful in getting to share those stories every day.

Price says Holland gets this. She not only offers information to potential and regular Lewis Ginter visitors, but also interacts with them and becomes their friend. Days after the conference, Holland receives a tweet from an unfamiliar follower: "Hey — it's b/c of your tweets that I'm visiting Lewis Ginter with my family 2morrow. You've made a buzz that's compelling — I feel invited."

## MAKE THE MOST OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Advice from Gradon Tripp, who also spoke at a meeting of Richmond's Social Media Club during his visit, offers a six-step formula for nonprofits to make the most of social media.

- 1 Know your mission. What do you do? In two or three short, short sentences.
- 2 Find your community. Where do they hang out? Can they find you?
- 3 Share your vision through your story. Find a story to tell to your community so they can retell it to others.
- 4 Invite the community to act. Use your social capital, the quantity of respect that you gain, and cash in. You have to be invested in a community to ask them to be involved.
- 5 Invite them to share your message. Are you making it as easy as possible for your community to send on your message?
- 6 Find groups that do what you do and work together.