

## Tweeting With A Meaning

Written by Melissa Larsen

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The rise of social media hasn't just impacted our personal and professional lives; it has brought awareness to worthy Valley causes. Here are five locals who Tweet on behalf of such noble nonprofits and their thoughts on how social media has impacted the charitable realm.



### Dan Uttech for Valley of the Sun YMCA

**Handle:** @VOSYMCA (plus, individual branch Twitter handles across the Valley)

**Number of followers:** 1,793

**Mission:** To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

**How has social media brought awareness to Valley of the Sun YMCA?** In March, on the inaugural Arizona Gives Day, we were able to harness the power of social media to inform people about our Annual Community Support Campaign. These programs and numerous others are all made possible by generous donors, members and the surrounding communities. Social media will help grow awareness of our programs and stories. Arizona Gives Day was a great way to start sharing stories about how the Y, as a nonprofit, helps to strengthen communities. Our goal is to continue to increase awareness about our social services and Annual Community Support Campaign.

**In what ways have you noticed an impact?** I am seeing more activity and mentions on our Twitter accounts. When a member mentions us, I thank them, but also ask what their healthy living goal was for that day. People respond with what they did and tell me what their next goal is. As I build the conversation, I look forward to informing YMCA followers about programs and activities as well as volunteer and donation opportunities. Through our Network For Good giving sites, we can create unique links to determine when donations are coming via social media.

**How do you think social media has shaped the way nonprofits operate?** Social media is built for sharing stories. We want to start sharing people's stories and how the YMCA has helped them. The Y is more than a gym, but we're still a gym. Let us know how focusing on healthy living has improved your life or how you met your best group of friends through a Zumba class. The Y impacts so many lives and we want to share those uplifting stories.

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**Jessica Pate for The Ben and Catherine Ivy Foundation and the T.W. Lewis Foundation**

**Handles:** @IvyFoundation; @TWLewisFound

**Number of followers:** Ivy Foundation: 420; T.W. Lewis Foundation: 200

**Mission:** Ivy Foundation: To fund and support research on brain cancer; The T.W. Lewis Foundation: To provide educational opportunities and improve the quality of life for children in need.

**How has social media brought awareness to the nonprofits?**

Social media has brought a tremendous amount of awareness to each of the foundations I work on behalf of. I frequently get messages from people asking what they can do to help or how they can raise money and awareness in their communities. With the Ivy Foundation, I always have people tweeting me about either them or someone they love being affected by brain cancer. It has also been a great platform to get the word out about foundation events, important news about the foundations and the progress being made by each of them.

**In what ways have you noticed an impact?** Social media has really provided people with a community to share different events and news, whereas without it they would have never known. More people are participating in local walks and volunteering because they found out about these opportunities on social media. Both foundations are based here in Arizona, but social media has allowed their work to be widely known across the country and even other parts of the world.

**How do you think social media has shaped the way nonprofits operate?** Social media has completely changed the way nonprofits work by providing a huge platform of people to reach out to and spread the word, which is incredibly powerful. I believe there are so many people out there that want to help, but are just not sure how to go about it. Social media gives people the tools and resources needed to get out there and help support the nonprofits that they are most passionate about.

**What is the most rewarding thing about what you do?** The most rewarding thing about what I do is being able to connect with people who are genuinely interested in the work each of the foundations do. Whether it is sharing the story of a young girl who lost her mother to brain cancer or spreading the word about a local college scholarship opportunity, I know that in some way these foundations impact someone's life.

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**Natalie Salvione for Ballet Arizona**

**Handle:** @BalletArizona

**Number of followers:** 5,165

**Mission:** To be innovative and provocative professional ballet company that creates, performs, and teaches outstanding classical and contemporary ballet.

**Why is this mission important to you?** Ballet Arizona's mission is important to me because not only does the company perform amazing ballets for the general public, we also reach over 35,000 children and families through our Education & Outreach programs each year.

**How has social media brought awareness to Ballet Arizona?** Social media has really opened us up to a broader audience. Some of our followers may have never seen us perform before, but thanks to social media they are able to see what is happening at Ballet Arizona on a daily basis. Based on our posts and tweets, they may be encouraged to purchase a ticket and actually come see a performance.

**In what ways have you noticed an impact?** After every performance, there are always posts and tweets on how much people appreciated and loved our shows. In one particular instance, one of our fans informed us via Facebook that not only was it their first time attending a performance, but, that due to their experience they had also become season subscribers. Social media is increasingly a more popular way of communication because it is so open yet intimate. I believe it makes our followers and patrons feel a closer connection to the company, which helps us build long lasting and meaningful relationships.

**How do you think social media has shaped the way nonprofits operate?** Social media is the fastest growing marketing outlet out there. Nonprofits can share their mission, success stories, fundraise, and even sell tickets. Thanks to things like Facebook Promotions and Twitter Advertising, we can reach a whole new variety of different audiences than through traditional marketing outlets such as the newspaper and radio. In today's fast-paced world, where most everyone has a smart phone, social media is the cheapest, fastest, most efficient way to get our

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message or product out there.



**Ciara Franklin for 100 Club of Arizona**

**Handle:** @az100club

**Number of followers:** 987

**Mission:** To provide immediate assistance to families of seriously injured or fallen public safety officers and firefighters, and to provide resources to enhance their safety and welfare.

**Why is its mission important to you?** My grandfather, father and brother are all Phoenix Firefighters (retired and active). When I was at Arizona State University, I was among the first recipients of the 100 Club of Arizona scholarship program, providing continuing education assistance for families of officers and firefighters throughout the state. The 100 Club helped my family tremendously when I was a student, and I wanted to give back to the organization that helped me get my degree.

**How has social media brought awareness to 100 Club of Arizona?** Social media plays a large role in the biggest marketing tool of all: word of mouth. Social media has allowed the 100 Club to share our successes with our supporters statewide and has helped us get one step closer of our goal to become a household name.

**In what ways have you noticed an impact?** Since the 100 Club jumped on the social media bandwagon, more and more people know who we are. So many of our supporters thank us for sharing our pictures and stories on the Web because they feel a connection to what we do.

**How do you think social media has shaped the way nonprofits operate?** Any business, particularly nonprofits, benefit from social media because of the viral effect it can cause. One picture is worth a thousand words...or is it a thousand likes, tweets, shares?

**What is the most rewarding thing about what you do?** The most rewarding moment comes when a family member of someone we have helped comes up to say what a difference we made. The 100 Club is the 911 call for our first responders in need, and it truly is a blessing to say that I work here.

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**Karin Graham for Arizona Humane Society**

**Handle:** @azhumane

**Number of followers:** 5,000

**Mission:** To safeguard, rescue, shelter, heal, adopt and advocate for animals in need, while inspiring community action and compassion on their behalf.

**How has social media brought awareness to the Arizona Humane Society?** Not only is social media a great way to reach supporters, but it also provides supporters with another way to show their commitment to a great cause. It is through a growing family of proud AHS pet parents and allies that we're able to spread the word about AHS' mission, programs and services, as well as start conversations that change the way people think about animal welfare in our community. .

**In what ways have you noticed an impact?** Through our social media efforts, we've been able to not only build amazing relationships with our advocates but have also been able to interact with volunteers, donors, adopters, corporate and media partners. We have also noticed that when we send a tweet regarding what is needed for our shelter pets it is often picked up by other media outlets which really enhances the effort.

**How do you think social media will shape/have shaped the way nonprofits operate?** Social media is a force to be reckoned with. It is your frontline when it comes to communicating with the public- storytelling, enhancing SEO, cross promotion of our low-cost programs/services, and most importantly, customer feedback and building and maintaining relationships. Every nonprofit should have a social media standards and practices in place as a part of their overall marketing and communications plan.

**What is the most rewarding thing about what you do?** Every day, I am inspired by the exceptional work of my colleagues, the unwavering support of our volunteers, and the spirit of the pets that touch our lives.

*Story by Melissa Larsen*