



American Red Cross: Small Changes Making Big Differences

Non-profit and community service organizations are always pressed for time, budget, and resources. But their focus is on fulfilling their mission, and their daily efforts are dedicated to connecting and supporting those that support them.

The American Red Cross is no different, and they've embraced the power of the social web to help raise awareness, connect with their donor base, and understand how they can better support the communities that they serve.

The American Red Cross is the nation's premier emergency response organization. As part of a worldwide movement that offers neutral humanitarian care to vulnerable people, the American Red Cross distinguishes itself by also aiding victims of devastating natural disasters. Over the years, the organization has expanded its services, always with the aim of preventing and relieving suffering.

Today, in addition to domestic disaster relief, the American Red Cross offers compassionate services in five other areas: community services that help the needy; support and comfort for military members and their families; the collection, processing and distribution of lifesaving blood and blood products; educational programs that promote health and safety; and international relief and development programs.

Wendy Harman, Social Media Manager at the Red Cross, has been using and leveraging Radian6 to help her organization measure their outreach efforts, collect intelligence and feedback from their community, and understand the issues that are important to their community.

"It wasn't easy to adapt to social media monitoring, actually," Harman says. Initially, the organization was concerned with some negative comments that were being posted across the web, and they were just using their monitoring capabilities to find and try to stem the negative tides.

But quickly, it became apparent to the Red Cross that there was more to monitoring than simply addressing criticism.

"We quickly learned that people are talking about the Red Cross every single day, and not always how we expected them to," says Harman. For example, the ARC often described themselves as dedicated to "collecting time, money, and blood" when discussing how their community could participate and support them.

But when they listened carefully to the conversations happening around their brand, they realized that their stakeholders were using words like "volunteer", "help", and "donate" when talking about their work with the Red Cross. Learning that helped the Red Cross refine their communications to focus on language that would be relevant to those that wanted to be involved with them.

Outreach through monitoring is also giving the Red Cross a human touch, and providing personalized points of contact to their supporters.





As an example, listening taught them that their blood donors were frustrated by the level and frequency of calls to donate. By sharing that information and feedback internally, they're looking at better and more personalized ways to reach their blood donors in the ways that they want to be communicated with, and improving their internal processes to accommodate those needs.

They've also learned that they have a passionate community of fans and advocates, and listening to how those people are talking about the organization is continually helping Harman and her colleagues understand how best to engage those advocates in their work and recruit volunteers. And with a half a million enthusiastic volunteers, the American Red Cross can empower them to be passionate evangelists for their work and cause.

The Platform

Harman and her team use a number of Radian6's features in order to manage their day to day monitoring as well as report results internally. They're working to integrate monitoring and outreach into their daily operations so that they can not only engage and respond but use the intelligence to strategize for the future.

The River of News is Harman's first step in the morning; she immediately downloads mentions and categorizes them, and checks out the social profiles of some of the people posting about the organization. The profile feature helps Harman understand and evaluate how connected any given person is in the community and how engaged they are in the social web.

She also looks closely at the Conversation Cloud and Topic Trends widgets to see what words and subjects are trending in relation to her organization. If she sees anything that's outside the norm, she makes a note and investigates further and reports back to the team.

Taking a look at key topics this way also helps Harman and the communications team understand how well their messaging and communications are penetrating the community, and how topics are trending over time. The team has even built a visibility calendar that helps them concentrate on specific issues and topics on a monthly basis, and the trend information they collect through monitoring helps them focus on topics that are relevant and timely.

"Radian6 has given us metrics to work with and ways to measure the effectiveness of our community outreach. It's shortened the timeframe for us to gather and analyze the information we collect so we can focus on turning those learnings into actionable strategies for our organization," Harman says.

Goals and the Future

As with many community organizations, the Red Cross is dedicated to cultivating their next generation of supporters, and social media is one of the primary strategies they're exploring to do that. By tapping into the social communications of the younger generations, the Red Cross will be better able to plug into their lifestyles and ensure that the Red Cross is visible and of interest to them.

"We've definitely come to understand how much the social web is relevant to our efforts," concludes Harman. "It's exciting to us to proactively engage our community through social communication and make their experiences with the Red Cross personal and relevant. Our community is reacting so positively to the personal outreach, and we're looking forward to keeping the human element of our work front and center."

