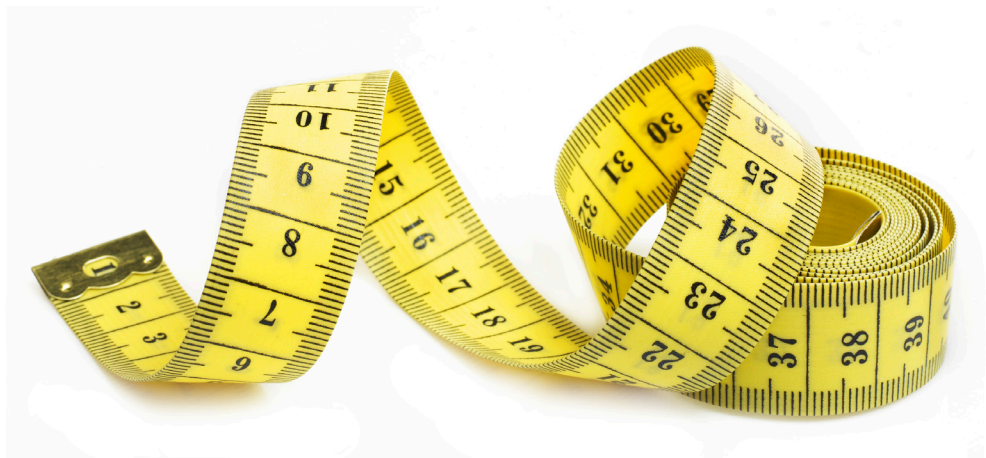


# 2010 Nonprofit Social Media Benchmarks Study

An Analysis of Growth and Social Engagement Metrics  
for Nonprofit Organizations

[www.e-benchmarksstudy.com/socialmedia](http://www.e-benchmarksstudy.com/socialmedia)

Researched and Prepared by



# Acknowledgements

This report was written by Arielle Holland, Karen Matheson, Marc Ruben, and Andrea Wood.

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## About M+R Strategic Services

M+R is dedicated to helping our clients advance their missions in order to bring about positive change. We do this by helping organizations and campaigns we believe in develop smart and effective strategies, hone their messages, mobilize their members, build grassroots support, raise money, and communicate effectively with the media, the public, and decision makers, both online and offline.

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*The complete report is available free online at: [www.e-benchmarksstudy.com](http://www.e-benchmarksstudy.com).*

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# Introduction

Nonprofits were flying blind in the early years of email fundraising and advocacy. Without industry-wide data, they could neither measure their performance against other groups nor set accurate goals for their programs and campaigns. In an effort to fill that data void, M+R and several partner organizations published the first eNonprofit Benchmarks Study in 2006 (the most recent eNonprofit Benchmarks study is available at: [www.e-benchmarksstudy.com](http://www.e-benchmarksstudy.com)).

Today when it comes to social media, nonprofits once again find themselves making it up as they go along. We wrote this benchmarks paper in the hopes of shedding some light on the exciting, rapidly evolving (and often confusing) world of online social media. Our goal is to help organizations - no matter their size - develop meaningful metrics for their social network outreach.

We focused on Facebook and Twitter because they've emerged as the favorites among most nonprofits for building relationships with supporters. Five major national nonprofit organizations took part in our Facebook research; data from ten organizations was used for our Twitter analysis.

# Key Findings

## How often do organizations post?

Organizations posted to their Facebook Pages an average of six times per week and tweeted four to five times per day.

## How often do fans post?

Each week, an average of 2.5% of each organization's Facebook fans took action (*e.g.* contributed wall posts, "likes," or comments).

## Easy come, easy go?

Organizations in our study saw both faster growth and higher churn of their social media audiences than is typical with email lists. Facebook fan bases grew by an average of 3.75% each month, and Twitter followers grew by 9% per month. But 2% of Facebook fans removed themselves or hid the news feed each month. (Unfortunately, Twitter does not track "un-follows.")

## More tweets = more followers?

In our sample, the more organizations tweeted, the more their followers retweeted them; those retweets led in turn to more new followers.

	Facebook Pages	Twitter
Monthly Growth	3.75%	9.00%
Monthly Churn	2.00%	-
Growth per wall post	0.23%	-
Wall posts or tweet frequency	6 per week	4.5 per day
Page view rate (views/ posts)	0.56%	-
Weekly fan action rate	2.50%	-

# Facebook

## Facebook Pages

### Fan Base Size

Facebook Pages provide a way for supporters, known as “fans” in Facebook lingo, to interact with nonprofits and other fans. However, many nonprofits are still learning how to effectively use Pages to engage and grow a fan base.

Study participants had a wide range of fan base sizes, ranging from 2,000 to nearly 210,000 on their Facebook Pages. Below is a breakdown of the fan counts of our study participants at the time of the study’s completion:

Participant	Current FB Fan Total
Human Rights Campaign (HRC)	209,500
Oxfam America	15,600
NARAL Pro-Choice America	8,600
Easter Seals	5,900
League of Conservation Voters (LCV)	2,400

### Fan Growth

The more fans an organization has, the more friends of fans will be reached per staff hour spent on Facebook; but growth rates *can* be compared across fan base size.

Participant	Avg Monthly Fan Growth Rate
HRC	4.42%
Oxfam America	2.17%
NARAL	4.71%
Easter Seals	5.95%
LCV	1.50%
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.75%</b>

The study found an average fan growth rate of 3.75% per month. It’s worth noting that this is a much

faster rate of growth than that of email lists, as reported in the last eNonprofit Benchmarks Study. (The 2009 study found an annual email list growth rate of 17%, or about 1.4% per month.)

In our sample, an organization's fan base grew by about 0.23% for each post by the organization. In other words, we would expect an organization whose fan base grew by around 1% per week to post at least five times per week.

We should point out that the overall growth rate for Facebook itself is high – with another 50 million users added between September and December of 2009 alone.

## Fan Churn

As with email, it's important to track when, how, and why supporters come and go. A fan can navigate to a nonprofit's Page and click the "Remove me from Fans" link or choose to "hide" the organization's news feed on his or her profile. (This is sort of a "remove-me lite" since technically he or she is still a fan.)

Based on our findings, it's "easy come, easy go" in the world of social media. Organizations should expect both faster growth and higher churn than they see with their email list. Among our study partners, the combined weekly average unsubscribe rate was 0.55% and the monthly average was 2%.

Unsubscribe Method	Weekly Avg	Monthly Avg
Hide news feed	0.36%	1.25%
Fan removal	0.19%	0.75%
<b>Average</b>	<b>0.55%</b>	<b>2.00%</b>

The overall fan churn rate – at 24% per year – is higher than the eNonprofit Benchmarks Study email churn rate of 19% per year. (That disparity is in reality likely even greater, because there is no way to track stale Facebook profiles, but stale emails are tracked because they start bouncing.)

## Posts by Organizations

On average, participating organizations posted on their walls six times each week. Over a two-month period, our study partners posted as many as eight and as few as three times per week.

The data suggested that there was a correlation between a higher number of posts and higher fan churn. However, the data also suggested that more posts also allowed more fan growth. We recommend

that each organization should establish baseline metrics and then work to find their fans' "sweet spot" between too many and too few posts.

## Page Views

Page views provide a measure of basic engagement or initial interest, similar to email click-through rates. We calculated average page views for participating organizations, normalizing them for scale:

Engagement Measure	Page Views Per week per 100 Fans
Total page views	10
Unique page views	2

## Page Views Per Post by an Organization

Maintaining a Facebook Page takes resources. So the 64-thousand-dollar question is: what does an organization stand to gain each time it posts something to its wall? We measured the average traffic to a Page for every post by an organization on its wall.

The study found that, for every post by an organization, 0.56% of that organization's fans viewed the Page:

Engagement Measure	Average
Avg total Page views <i>per org post</i>	337
Avg unique Page views <i>per org post</i>	116
Avg Page view rate <i>per org post</i>	0.56%

Though Page *views* are less important than actual *actions* by fans (just as email click-through rates are less important than response rates), Page view rate is an important metric to track, in part because Pages are viewable by anyone – so it includes Page views by non-fans. And of course, Page views lead to fan base growth, since most users will view a page before they become a fan.

## Fan Actions

Fans can take a number of actions on a Facebook Page: they can post to the page (just like an organization can), comment on a post, or “like” a post (by giving it an electronic thumbs-up).

Engagement Measure	Average
Avg fan actions per organization post	67
Avg fan actions per fan post	4
Weekly fan action rate	2.5%

We measured the average number of total fan actions per organization post – including “likes” and comments. This varied widely by organization size, ranging from 10 to 250 for our sample. We found an average of 67 fan actions per organization post.

Fans don’t just interact with an organization; they also engage with each other on a Page. Fans can respond with a “like” or comment on fan posts, too. Our study partners saw an average of four fan responses (either likes or comments) per fan post.

The weekly fan action rate – the number of actions per fan, per week – is perhaps the most critical metric to measure the success of your Facebook Page. A high fan action rate leads to even more fan engagement, since news feeds carry all that activity to potential new fans. Our study partners’ average weekly fan action rate was 2.5%.

## Facebook Pages Wrap-Up

How should an organization put these social networking benchmarks to work?

**Focus on tracking your own activity**, so you can compare it to these benchmarks. Each organization is unique – just as with email, there is no “one size fits all” approach to social media nor is there any one key metric to try to hit. Measure where you are now, and focus on improving those results over time.

**Make sure your content is engaging** – that’s the first thing to look at if your fans aren’t responding at the same rates as other groups. Pay attention to the post styles and topics that yield the biggest fan response. Fan actions translate into free advertisement for your Page in fan news feeds, and that will spur growth.

**How many posts are too many?** The answer to this question will depend on your organization. As with email, fans will probably be forgiving of heavier posting during critical moments – such as when a key piece of legislation is on the move, or when there’s a mission-related emergency. Run a Pages report on a monthly basis, and look at the trends after periods of heavy posting to see the impact on your fan growth and churn rates.

## Facebook Groups

There seems to be a general trend toward Pages and away from Groups – which was also reflected by the organizations in our sample. A Group is more like a club – with administrators (officers) and a singular purpose. Facebook Pages provide a more robust approach to engagement, especially when you factor in the many applications available. Here’s a quick pro/con comparison of Pages and Groups:

Feature	Pages	Groups
Send email to members’ Inbox	No (updates)	Yes (5,000 member cap)
Must tie to admin profile	No	Yes
Icon on fan/member profile	Yes	No
Tight permission controls	No	Yes
Applications	Yes (tens of thousands)	Yes (basic only)
Fan/ Friend cap	No	No

Ultimately, Facebook Pages offer more bang for the buck than Groups, and most nonprofits are now using Pages as their primary engagement tool on Facebook.

## A note about Facebook Causes

There was a lot of excitement when the Causes application first hit Facebook. Finally, a way to raise money via Facebook! Although a few organizations have found significant fundraising success via Causes, most organizations haven't raised much through the application. Only a small fraction of the 180,000 organizations on Facebook have raised more than \$1,000 .

That said, in the first five days after the Haiti earthquake struck in January, 2010, the top Cause for Haiti earthquake relief - benefiting Oxfam America - had raised over \$100,000.

Below are the top five Causes listed in order of total money raised (snapshot taken Nov. 6, 2009):

Nonprofit Organization	Total Members	\$ Donated to Date	Avg. \$ per Member
Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorders Service of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta	1,047,021	\$1,165,395	\$1
The Nature Conservancy	155,753	\$333,630	\$2
TPRF: Food for People	4,233	\$224,330	\$53
Overseas China Education Foundation (OCEF)	4,876	\$189,157	\$39
Tibetan Freedom Movement	52,874	\$162,709	\$3

**Aflac Cancer Center** - This organization appears to have raised big money via Facebook Causes, but upon closer inspection Aflac itself donated \$999,999 and its Chairman and CEO, Dan Amos, donated \$100,000. Without those two donations, Aflac is left with \$65,396, or about six cents per member.

**The Nature Conservancy** - Fully two-thirds of the money raised by the Nature Conservancy was donated via their Lil' Green Patch application which has enjoyed unusual popularity. Speaking to the Washington Post about the relative fundraising power of Causes, a Nature Conservancy staffer said "I definitely think it's first and foremost a tool for brand and reputation...It definitely does more for influence than for fundraising."

**TPRF: Food for People** - It's hard to tell exactly what strategy led to the large sum of money donated via Facebook. More than \$10,000 has been donated via America's Giving Challenge and 23 of the donors in the organizations "Hall of Fame" have given over \$500. It may be that TPRF has "seeded" its Facebook page by inviting its regular donors to give via the Facebook channel instead of other channels.

**Overseas China Education Fund (OCEF)** - Other than the \$17,000 given via America's Giving Challenge this looks like a straightforward effort with few special "gimmicks," apps, or seed donors.

**Tibetan Freedom Movement** - Also a winner through the America's Giving Challenge, which channeled \$34,500 in donations out of the \$162,709 total donated to this Cause. This Cause also seems to have joined with eleven other organizations to raise money for the Prem Rawat Foundation

# Twitter

## Follower Base

We analyzed 10 diverse organizations that are among the most successful nonprofits on Twitter based on number of followers:

Twitter Name	Followers	Oct. Tweets	Nov. Tweets
@CharityWater	1,220,978	177	211
@CARE	222,935	174	257
@AcumenFund	219,060	37	79
@LiveEarth	98,833	76	72
@RedCross	29,342	34	21
@Greenpeace	26,110	288	461
@Brainline	21,560	94	97
@Oxfam	11,434	93	123
@HRC	6,812	163	120
@NARAL	3,874	93	108

Organizations can track their Twitter statistics using a variety of free and paid web tools (See Appendix B for the ones we used in this study). Although these tools do offer some good basic data, datasets are sometimes limited. Many provide data only from the previous 30 days; others experience lag time or display data in inconsistent periods. Keeping your own offline data for long-term tracking is critical. Moreover, some data these sites provide is less helpful, such as one site's "Daily Reach Rate" or follower growth predictions.

Organizations should also be wary of "Twitter Rank" or tools that will compare your account with others. Each service that ascribes a "rank" uses proprietary algorithms that may judge your organization against metrics that are not important; they intrinsically are designed for ranking individual users, not organizations. Instead, it is best to measure where you are, and set specific goals based on your available resources and the kind of relationship you want to build with followers. Your own objectives and goal-setting matter far more than an arbitrarily assigned ranking.

## Tweets by Organization

The organizations in our data set sent on average four to five tweets per day. Tweet frequency varied widely - total tweets for the entire month of November ranged from 21 for the American Red Cross to 461 for Greenpeace, for example.

## Follower Growth

The average monthly follower growth for our Twitter sample was 9% - much higher than average monthly growth on both Facebook Fan pages (3.75%) and nonprofit email lists (1.4%). It is worth noting that Twitter itself has seen exponential growth - unique visitors grew by 1,200% from November 2008 to November 2009.

As with Facebook, a primary driver of follower growth is the ability for followers to share, or retweet, an organization's message on Twitter with their own followers. In our sample we found a trend relating tweets to follower growth: more tweets lead to more retweets, which lead in turn to more follower growth. The more you tweet, the more new followers you'll gain.

Of course, this assumes your tweets are worth reading! The organizations in this sample have built solid followings, presumably because their content is engaging.

## Follower Churn

We were unable to find a free tool that can measure how many people "un-follow" a Twitter feed. Under extreme conditions, you would see a decrease in total followers if un-following outpaced recruitment. But in most cases, "un-follows" are simply rolled up into total follower counts - hidden by net growth.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Methodology & Terminology

### Methodology

To provide meaningful metrics no matter the size of the organization, we provide benchmark metrics “per supporter” where possible. For example, we calculated the Facebook fan action rate in our sample by dividing total fan actions by the number of fans (2.5% average). This is similar to the benchmark calculation for email response rate (number of actions divided by total number of recipients).

### Glossary of Terms

**Monthly fan growth rate** - Number of fans at the end of a month, minus the number of fans at the beginning of the month, divided by the number of fans at the beginning of the month.

**Fan churn** - The rate at which fans either 1) remove themselves as a fan; or 2) hide an organization’s news feed from their Facebook profile. The study calculated a fan churn rate by adding together fans who clicked the “hide news feed” button or “remove me,” then dividing that number by the total number of fans.

**Hide news feed rate** - The number of fans who hid an organizations news feed divided by the total number of fans.

**Fan removal rate** - The number of fans who clicked “Remove me from fans” divided by the total number of fans.

**Page view** - Same as for web page metrics; one page view means an individual viewed an organization’s Facebook Page one time. “Total page views” includes multiple page views by a single person. “Unique page views” strips out repeat page views by the same individual. Pages are visible to non-fans and people without a Facebook profile, so Page view totals includes those people as well, not just fans.

**Page view rate** - Total unique page views divided by number of posts, divided by number of fans.

**Organization post** - A post by an organization to the organization’s wall on its Page (text, link, video, picture, audio, etc).

**Fan post** - A post by a fan to the organization’s wall on its Page (text, link, video, picture, audio etc).

**Fan like** – A fan who clicks “like” in response to a wall post on a Page.

**Fan comment** – A comment added by a fan to a wall post on a Page.

**Fan action** – Any action by a fan on a Page, including wall posts, comments, and “likes”.

**Fan action rate** – Total fan actions divided by total number of fans. We should note that the weekly fan action rate of 2.5% includes repeat actions by one fan, not just unique actions. So if a single fan registers a “like” and also makes two comments in the same week, three actions are counted.

## Appendix B: Participating Organizations

Study participants Human Rights Campaign (HRC), Oxfam America, NARAL Pro-Choice America, Easter Seals, and the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) are M+R clients.

### Facebook sample:

- Human Rights Campaign (HRC) (<http://www.facebook.com/humanrightscampaign>)
- Easter Seals (<http://www.facebook.com/easterseals>)
- NARAL (<http://www.facebook.com/naralprochoiceamerica>)
- League of Conservation Voters (LCV) (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/pages/Washington-DC/League-of-Conservation-Voters/16477459734>)
- Oxfam America (<http://www.facebook.com/oxfamamerica>)

M+R collected Facebook Page activity, fan growth, and fan unsubscribe data from each organization for three months: July through September, 2009.

For Facebook Causes, M+R collected data for the top five Causes by total dollars donated, including Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorders Service of Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, The Nature Conservancy, The Prem Rawat Foundation, Overseas China Education Foundation (OCEF), and the Tibetan Freedom Movement.

## Twitter Sample:

Twitter Name	Followers	Joined Twitter
@CharityWater	1,220,978	March-09
@CARE	222,935	October-08
@AcumenFund	219,060	February-09
@LiveEarth	98,833	May-07
@RedCross	29,342	June-07
@Greenpeace	26,110	April-07
@Brainline	21,560	January-09
@Oxfam	11,434	December-07
@HRCBackStory	6,812	January-09
@NARAL	3,874	October-08

The Twitter analysis used publicly available data for the organizations listed; they did not collaborate with M+R on this study. Twittercounter.com was used to calculate tweet and follower totals for October through December, 2009. Retweet data was tracked during December 2009 using twitteranalyzer.com.

## Appendix C: Sources

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## Appendix D: Facebook's Built-In Metrics

Facebook gives Page administrators an Insight metrics dashboard. In many ways, it's a one-stop shop for all your analytics needs as far as your Page is concerned – fan base growth and churn, fan engagement counts, and even geographic and demographic information about your fans is all displayed here...and it's all downloadable for additional analysis. But the Insights dashboard will also introduce you to a "Post Quality" metric, which provides you with both a number score and some number of stars, out of five. We tested this proprietary metric and found no relationship between an organization's weekly "Post Quality" and other key metrics identified in this study, like unsubscribe rates or fan base growth.

Our advice here is similar to what we have to say about "Twitter Rank" (see page 12) – be wary of comparative metrics built from proprietary algorithms. Track the basics, set your own goals and objectives, and strive to improve your relationship with your fans on your own terms – not Facebook's.

Read and download this report – and find others at [www.e-benchmarksstudy.com](http://www.e-benchmarksstudy.com)

Learn more about M+R Strategic Services at [www.mrss.com](http://www.mrss.com)

