Facebook – What Type of Presence Does an Association Want?

By: Dea C. Franck, Esq.

While there are some universal pros and cons of having a Facebook presence, some pros and cons exist depending on the type of Facebook presence the association wants. Does the association want to administer a public Facebook Page, a public Facebook Group, a private Facebook Group, or a combination of these options?

Facebook Pages can be viewed by everyone on the internet. Facebook Pages allow people with Facebook profiles to follow that page by "liking" it. When someone "likes" a Facebook Page, those folks will receive updates in their News Feed. It also allows those folks to interact with the Page.

Facebook Groups can be public or private (either closed or secret). The chart at the end of this article from Facebook shows the differences with these three types of Groups. If your association is considering forming a private Facebook Group, it is probably better to form a "secret" Group rather than a "closed" Group because a "secret" Group better protects the Group members' privacy. For example, only members can see who is in the Group and who is tagged in the Group.

PROS

- Facebook is free!
- Facebook is a quick and effective way of getting information out to association members.
- Facebook allows associations to update their members in "real time" compared to a monthly paper newsletter or weekly email.
- It can build a sense of community and allow members to communicate with each other.
- It allows for a more conversational interaction between the association and its members. (This can also be a con.)

CONS

- The comment feature gives members the ability to rant, post negative comments about other members and the association, and to get into angry exchanges with each other. This can be especially devastating on a public Facebook Page. It can also destroy any sense of community a Facebook presence would have created.

- Because of potential for negativity, the association's Page and/or Group needs to be constantly monitored.
- The constant monitoring of the site(s) can be time consuming.
- Members could think that the Facebook Page or Group is the proper forum with which to notify the association of an important issue (or at least an issue that is important to the person posting) instead of calling or writing to management or the board.
- Having a negative Facebook (or internet) presence can negatively affect sales in the community.
- The chances of being liable for defamation increases with having a Facebook Page or Group. This is why constant monitoring of the site(s) is extremely important.
- While the association will have some control over the Page or Group, Facebook is the actual administrator of the site which means that the association has less control over the site compared to operating its own website.
- It is easy to create fake profiles using stolen pictures. People can use these fake profiles to insult or harass people while impersonating another person.

TIPS FOR SETTING UP AND USING A FACEBOOK PAGE OR GROUP

- Verify that the people wanting to join your Group are actually association members.
- Adopt a social media policy which includes, but is not limited to, rules regarding who gets to post and what types of posts are prohibited. These rules should also state that the association reserves the right to delete posts and block users for repeated violations of the policy. The association should also consider utilizing the controls offered by Facebook to moderate the posts by others, such as the profanity filters. Go to https://www.facebook.com/help/131671940241729 for help with how to moderate Page content. The policy should also state that site is not the proper forum to lodge a complaint, submit a question, or to request association records.
- Invitations to join the Page or Group should be sent to all association members.
- Board members should be cautioned regarding posting and responding to member posts. If board members do post, then the content of those posts should be neutral. Board members should not respond directly to a member's posts because a member can interpret that response as that board member speaking on behalf of the entire board.
- Monitor the Page/Group on a daily basis.
- Be careful that what is posted does not waive attorney-client privilege or reveal information that is confidential. Whatever is said on Facebook can never be unsaid. Even if the post is deleted, someone could have already taken a screen shot of a post and disseminated it.
- Remember that D & O insurance coverage does not provide coverage for intentional wrong-doing. For example, if a board member defames a member or other third party by way of a Facebook post, D & O insurance will not cover that.

Facebook Groups

	Public	Closed	Secret
Who can join?	Anyone can join or be added or invited by a member	Anyone can ask to join or be added or invited by a member	Anyone, but they have to be added or invited by a member
Who can see the group's name?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see who's in the group?	Anyone	Anyone	Only current members
Who can see the group description?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see the group tags?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see what members post in the group?	Anyone	Only current members	Only current members
Who can find the group in search?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see stories about the group on Facebook (ex: News Feed and search)?	Anyone	Only current members	Only current members

https://www.facebook.com/help/220336891328465.
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For more information regarding how Facebook Pages versus Facebook Groups work as well as how to set-up and administer those Pages or Groups, please go to https://www.facebook.com/help/.

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