Lower Manhattan Cultural Council

Training, Networking, Talks: Arts Advancement Series

Boost Your Social Media Presence

Questions for Bill Bragin: Internet and Social Media

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In 2012, social media remains an evolving terrain in which artists and organizations must determine which platforms, levels of participation, and tracking methods are most effective and sustainable for their own needs. To inform this process, LMCC invited six artists and arts professionals who are effectively using social media to share their approaches, successes, and lessons learned.

1. *Briefly describe your work as an artist and any other roles or affiliations you have as an arts professional.*

   As director of public programming for Lincoln Center, I curate two festivals: *Midsummer Night Swing* and *Lincoln Center Out of Doors*, as well as additional concerts as part of Target Free Thursdays at the David Rubenstein Atrium. In addition to my work at Lincoln Center, I am a co-founding producer of the annual globalFEST showcase festival, which now includes the main festival every January, a small touring support fund and curatorial work at other festivals. I am a music adviser to the TED Conferences, and DJ occasionally as part of GlobeSonic Sound System.

2. *When and how did you start using social media professionally? How and why do you use it now?*

   I started using social media professionally around 2000, when I was curator of music programs at Symphony Space. Having previously been very active, and professionally visible as producer of Central Park SummerStage, I was concerned that some of my friends and professional peers were not as aware of the programs that Symphony Space was offering, so I started emailing information about events to a list of friends, professional colleagues, and press contacts. I also started DJing around that time, so the emails were used to promote upcoming gigs. For the first 2 years or so, I kept all names in an excel chart and mailed to 100 people at a time, which was the limit our mail server allowed. Eventually, that became unwieldy, so I signed up for **Yahoo! Groups** in 2002, and created my **listserve** "ActiveCultures," a riff on my DJ name "Acidophilus" and my freelancing company: Acidophilus: Live & Active Cultures. (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/activecultures/)

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Also around the same time, I co-founded an industry listserve, also administrated through Yahoo! Groups, for world music presenters in North America. This listserve was designed as an extension of in-person meetings at various conferences, such as WOMEX (World Music Expo), the North American Folk Alliance, and the Association of Performing Arts Presenters annual conference, and became the main mechanism to exchange information with other curators from across the continent. The members of the listserve continue to meet in person at industry events, and use the list to continue the conversations, including arranging block booking, giving advice on artists and fees, discussing challenges, sharing discoveries from conferences and festivals attended by one or another member.

As I moved from Symphony Space to Joe's Pub and then to Lincoln Center, I have continued to rely on my personal email Yahoo! Groups list to let friends and colleagues know about the projects I am working on, as well as highlighting select events that I would like to recommend. Occasionally, other arts organizations will ask me to promote their events, offer discount codes to their events, and so on, which I do on a selected basis. I have also used the list for political fundraising during the last presidential election. While I never have considered it to be a "blog" and skipped that particular social media form, a number of people who read it regularly do refer to it as a blog, because of the personal tone and variety of information, especially about events that I'm not necessarily involved in.

In general, my use of social media comes from a belief that no matter how effective the marketing or press departments are, there is no one who can advocate for the artists and performances I have curated with the same level of investment as I can do myself. When I talk about events I'm working on, I try to convey my enthusiasm for the project, and let my readers know why I think a given project is worth my time and energy, and therefore, worth theirs. My Twitter bio reads, "Imposing his taste on friends and strangers since 19___" and I look at social media as an extension of my curatorial work. It's a way to champion artists and ideas I find inspiring.

In 2008, I joined **Facebook** (intrigued that they were sponsoring one of the presidential debates) and became a highly active user. Because I have a wide circle of friends and professional acquaintances, Facebook quickly became a fairly significant additional tool to spread the word about events I am working on. I created an ActiveCultures group on FB (https://www.facebook.com/groups/36938184062/) as well, and will often cross-post from my Yahoo list. The Facebook group has more frequent updates, and I recently changed the protocol to allow others to post as well, so that it can function more as a discussion platform, and less as an announcement tool. At this point, there are about the same number of members of this group as my Yahoo! Groups list, with some degree (not measured) of overlap.

In 2009, a new digital media manager joined the staff of Lincoln Center, and asked me to tweet on behalf of our festivals. I had not used Twitter before so I joined to test it out and to understand it better (@ActiveCultures). I quickly became a heavy user of **Twitter** as well. There is a significant amount of cross-posting between the two outlets, though I've evolved to reserve Facebook for personal friends, and Twitter as my more "professional" outlet. I post far more frequently on Twitter, and tend to read it first, before I check Facebook.

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I also use Twitter as my news curator – I follow a combination of friends, strangers, and media sites – with a few entertainment/parody feeds thrown in for fun. It's been a way to expand my networks, to bring articles to my attention from outlets I don't read regularly, and to stay informed on various art forms. My feed includes experts in world music, modern dance, jazz, indie music, theater, classical/new music as well as tech/innovation, and political topics. I re-tweet fairly often. I also live-tweet conferences and other events I go to, which has become an important way of amplifying the conversation and events to those not in attendance, as well as to connect with others who are. Most of the major surges in follower counts have come when live-tweeting an event (although I've also probably lost a number of followers in the process). I have a personal feed, as well as several professional feeds for the events that I work on, which I share with other tweeters.

I use Twitter to promote events I am working on, of course, though I'm careful not to rely on it solely as a promotional tool. I liken Twitter to being at a cocktail party. If you are talking to someone who only talks about themselves, you'll quickly get bored and move on —but if you are talking with someone with diverse interests, who is generous with information about a wide variety of topics, when the conversation turns to what they are working on themselves, you're inclined to be more interested, since it comes in a larger context.

In addition to Twitter and Facebook, which are my most active platforms, I started a **Tumblr** about a year ago (http://liveandactivecultures.tumblr.com/). I primarily use it as a place to collect and share photos, video links, and occasional articles that feel like they should somehow be more "permanent" than FB or Twitter. I check in on **Foursquare** to selected locations – mostly arts venues and restaurants that I want to champion (and to collect a few badges.) I've signed on to **Google+,** but have not really used it.

I also use **Spotify** regularly, for music discovery and research, and along with YouTube, it's become one of my primary A&R research tools, even more than checking out artists' own web sites. I have also used **Turntable.fm** for "listening parties" to play music from upcoming festivals and chat with potential attendees, and as a way to re-experience the fun of playing records while chatting with friends. I use **Kickstarter**, as well as some other crowdfunding sites, and do follow a few friends on Kickstarter to see what projects they support.

3. ***Do you use any tools or methods to track readership, website traffic, click-throughs, shares or other evidence that you are reaching and engaging people? If so, which tools and why?***

I don't track my traffic or click-thrus, etc. I leave that to the marketing department. I do keep an eye on my number of followers on Twitter. I also know my Klout score, though don't pay it much mind.

4. ***If you have one great success story about using social media, please share it.***

About a year ago, I tweeted a link to a song by a composer I am a big fan of. A choreographer who follows me on Twitter listened and loved the song, and ended up seeking out more music by this composer. They ended up meeting via my Twitter feed and then in person, and found that they had a lot in common in terms of artistic and other intellectual interests. Ultimately, the choreographer ended up commissioning the composer to score his next dance piece, and I moderated the post-performance talk-back on the theme of collaboration. It's Twitter's ability to find and create communities of shared interest that makes it a powerful tool.

5. *Please share the most important lesson you've learned using social media – or a "mistake" you think that others could learn from.*

I think of social media as a performance. While I will share a fair degree of seemingly personal information, I am always aware that it's a public forum, and that my followers are indeed an "audience." While honesty and directness are important in creating a compelling social media identity, it's important to realize that it's merely a projected identity, and that one's posts can very easily become decontextualized, and used in ways other than intended.

6. *How do you manage and prioritize your time and effort on social media?*

I have Facebook and Twitter open on my desktop pretty much all day – I check them both at the beginning of the day, in between phone calls, before or after lunch, before leaving the office, as well as while waiting for the subway, and unfortunately, walking down the street (though I'm trying to wean myself off that habit). Twitter can often provide my bedtime reading as I follow links posted by friends. At this point, I reflexively process my experiences as an audience member in terms of how I will tweet about it after or during, so in some ways it's made me more analytical and a more active audience member, while in other ways, it's made it harder to be fully present.

7. *What do you consider to be important "dos and don'ts" for using social media?*

Do: be generous. Twitter, especially, should be about sharing ideas, information, links…an interesting feed gives you access to things you might have otherwise missed.

Do: respond to others with meaningful (or witty) comments, with re-tweets and forwards, with answers to questions, with thoughtful, related information.

Do: be personable. Give people a sense of who you are as an author and come up with a social media voice. When you share information, knowing a bit about who the person is who does the sharing helps readers to understand how to interpret and value it.

Do: separate your feeds. It took me a while to realize this. In Facebook, too frequent updates are likely to alienate your friends, and cause them to hide or even drop you. On Twitter, frequent updates can actually lead to growth in your follower counts. Keep in mind that Facebook is a closed, and reciprocal community – everyone you follow follows you back. Twitter is open, and unidirectional. You don't have to follow back everyone who follows you, nor do you have to be accepted by the person you are following (in most cases.) Without that emotional baggage of "Friendship" added to the mix, it's easier to follow someone for a short period of time when it's useful (for example, someone attending the same conference) and then "unfollow" them when it ceases to be useful.

Don't: be afraid to disagree with someone publicly – some of the most interesting Twitter conversations I have had have been among friends who had a public discussion about a controversial topic —but don't flame, don't resort to name-calling, don't elevate a disagreement into personal attacks.

Don't: be overly promotional all the time, or talk only about yourself. It gets boring quickly, and there's no reason to keep reading.