

SOCIAL MEDIA (continued from page 3)

understand how people talk. HSUS uses an iGoogle page with RSS feeds to listen to what others are saying about them, she said.

- **Welcome differences of opinion/feedback.** Don't be afraid when people disagree with you, because the combination of positive and negative feedback generates conversation. "We had a situation where people complained and [the organization] changed the way it operated, because we take feedback seriously," Lewis said.

- **Keep it professional.** Do not take negative comments personally. "It can be hard not to," Lewis said, "when you love your organization and mission, but you can't, because if you do, you'll feel a need to respond in a brash way, and you can't let your emotions get to you when leading an official social media presence."

Take these best practices into account the next time you notice a not-so-nice comment on your page and

develop a comment policy for your organization if it doesn't have one, the director said.

"It's a hot topic because these platforms are where people communicate, but it's so new, it's hard to know how to do this effectively," said Lewis.

For more information

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) works to reduce suffering and improve the lives of all animals by advocating for better laws; investigating animal cruelty; conducting campaigns to reform industries; providing animal rescue and emergency response; and caring for animals through its sanctuaries, emergency shelters, wildlife rehabilitation centers, and clinics. To learn more, visit www.humanesociety.org/; www.facebook.com/humanesociety; or <http://twitter.com/#!/HumaneSociety>. To read the HSUS social media guidelines/comments policy, visit www.facebook.com/humanesociety?sk=info. ■

NTEN experts share tips to handle negative social media comments

NTEN's Sarah Janczak, community manager, and Amy Sample Ward, director of membership, said in an email to *Nonprofit Business Advisor* that negative social media comments come with the territory: Once you engage the public online, you're bound to face unhappy or angry comments. And the more controversial or advocacy-oriented your organization's messages are, the more likely you'll be to attract such comments, they said.

Janczak and Sample Ward recommended that organizations prepare in advance, so that when negative comments do happen, you'll have an easy-to-implement response plan in place. The NTEN experts suggested the following two-step plan:

First, operate with the assumption that the negative comments come from misinformation. Say thank you and provide links or resources to help clear up any confusion. Don't take comments personally, because negative comments are a teaching opportunity and a chance to engage with someone in your community that you might otherwise never connect with.

Secondly, ensure you have an engagement policy public on your website, your Facebook page, and anywhere else you may be open for user content. This policy should outline the kinds of engagement you want to support, as well as the kinds of comments or behavior that are unacceptable. Be sure to include what actions you'll take to defend the positive environment. This means that you'll delete bad comments—*bad* should be defined—or block repeat offenders. If your

first response elicits another negative comment, you'll have the policy in place to take action.

Finally, NTEN management said to remember that there are two types of motivation for negative comments:

- **Misinformation.** This is the "good" kind of negative comment because it provides you with an opportunity to answer questions, provide insight, or make corrections that many more people than just the commenter can benefit from. Remember, one person asking a question or attacking a point means there may be others who are thinking the same way but who didn't comment. It's also a great kind of negative comment because there's an opportunity to change the opinion of the commenter, and convert them to support your mission.

- **A Troll.** Unfortunately, you aren't going to win over a troll. They are commenting for a variety of reasons, most of which have little or nothing to do with you or your specific organization. If you are a public figure or a prominent advocacy organization, your online content will attract negative comments from people wanting to be part of the spotlight, seen as a whistleblower, or as a derailer of the conversation. They may have many other much more sinister reasons for commenting, as well.

To learn more

NTEN aspires to a world where all nonprofit organizations use technology skillfully and confidently to meet community needs and fulfill their missions. To find out more, go to www.nten.org/. ■