

Social media is doggone hard work

Marcie Davis of Santa Fe, New Mexico, started International Assistance Dog Week (IADW), a project of the not-for-profit organization Soulful Presence, several years ago. Originally created to honor assistance dogs nationwide, the effort expanded internationally in 2011. The goal of the project is to inform more people about assistance dogs and help assistance dog organizations raise funds through the media focus the event can bring to their activities.

IADW started using Facebook and Twitter in February 2011 to reach people around the world even though the project has a very low budget. "I'm not sure we could have expanded without something as cost-effective as Facebook," observes Ellen Cline, publicist for IADW. With a part-time staff of two, Cline explains that she cross-posts for IADW automatically from Facebook to Twitter to save time yet still reach people who prefer Twitter.



Courtesy International Assistance Dog Week, a program of Soulful Presence, Inc.

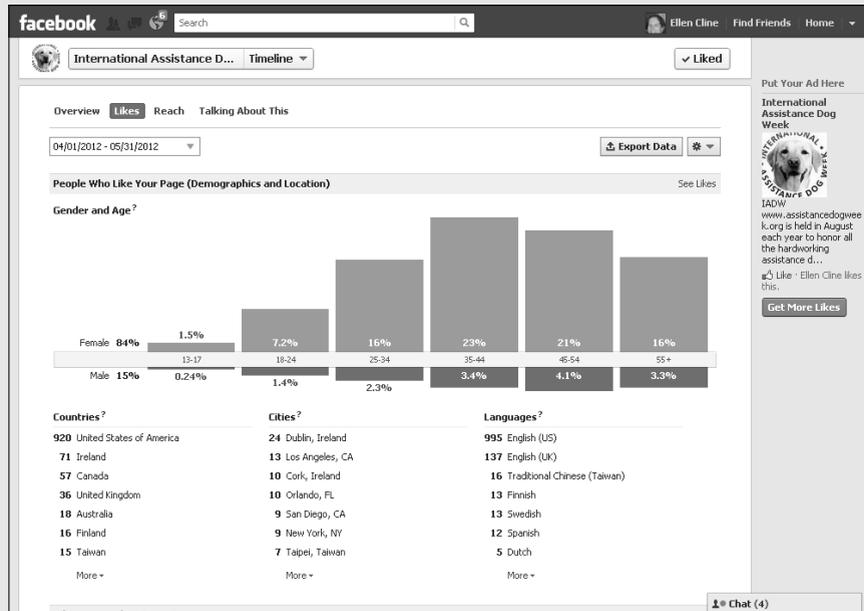
The target audience is broad. "We want to talk to anyone who has an assistance dog, is interested in assistance dogs, is a puppy raiser, trainer, or member of an assistance dog organization," Cline says.

For IADW, which is supported by donations and grants, traffic statistics are critical. Cline uses Insights for the Facebook page and Google Analytics for its website, www.assistance-dogweek.org. "The metrics and demographics are useful to potential sponsors to show them the audience we reach and that this audience is also one they want to reach. It helps convince them that they will receive value from their support of IADW."

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Cline also uses Google Alerts every day to keep up on assistance dog related news and to find news stories to post to the Facebook page. "We tag dog training organizations that are mentioned in the news stories and then they can share the news as well. We also share a lot of stories from dog organizations that we like on Facebook."

Their web developer added Facebook and Twitter chiclets to the website and customized their Constant Contact e-newsletter. "We now spend about an hour a day on two dog-related Facebook pages, IADW and Working like Dogs [a separate, but related organization also founded by Marcie Davis]."

As a publicist and copywriter, Cline takes advantage of multiple arrows in the publicity quiver. She uses e-newsletters, press releases, banner ads on media sponsors' sites, and public service announcements (PSAs) on radio and TV. She's also well aware of the value of integration. "We use the Constant Contact app on the Facebook page and the sign-up link on the website to increase e-newsletter subscriptions. The TV PSA that runs on TV stations and cable is also available on YouTube. There's also some crossover from the Working Like Dogs podcasts on Pet Life Radio, since some guests are from assistance dog organizations." Pet Life Radio is also a media sponsor for IADW and the podcasts are cross-linked from the IADW site and blog.

Cline is realistic about the limits of social media commitment for small businesses and non-profits. "It's never-ending and takes more time than you might think. Be prepared to allot some time to this every day. Decide if you can do it yourself; otherwise share the work with someone else."

International Assistance Dog Week's web presence

www.assistancedogweek.org

www.twitter.com/IADWeek

www.facebook.com/assistancedogweek

www.assistancedogweek.org/feed (RSS)

www.petliferadio.com/workingdogs.html (Podcast)

www.youtube.com/user/soulfulpresence