
La Montañita Food Co-op

COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERIES NOTES

March 15, 2016

Using Online Platforms to Increase Membership Engagement

Facilitated by: Jeff Hertz

Topic: We will explore the challenges and opportunities of using online platforms and other informational technology to increase membership engagement. This includes exploring our use of Basecamp, the co-op website, and social media among other tools. A guest speaker will share about a new local app called CivNet that is under development as a community-building tool.

Presentation

Guest speaker: Charlie Wisoff, Founder of CivNet
charlie@civnet.co

- CivNet (civnet.co) is a web platform with a civic engagement purpose - helping people and communities be involved and create change on issues they care about.
- I have been committed to and studied civic engagement over the past five years. There are challenges:
 - Organizations are siloed
 - Despite the increase in online options for social networking, only 25% of people using online civic and political spaces are becoming more engaged. There are multiple barriers to engagement.
- CivNet helps people organize and empowers users to:
 - Understand what's happening in their community
 - Connect with others who care about similar issues
 - Find opportunities to get involved
 - Take action on shared problems
- Users can organize around action plans with a common interest/goal
- The goal is not to displace other existing services. La Montanita is building its own app, has a website, and Facebook page. This is to supplement that, not replace it.
- CivNet is much more project oriented and helps measure social impact by collecting data on participation.
- Everything I have talked about so far is free. There are some organizational services that we will charge for at some point: Cheaper and more effective community outreach and data analysis.
- We are piloting the beta version. It is not perfect yet, but good enough for people to start using it. There are 270 beta users signed up. These are "super citizens" — very involved in the community.
 - Charlie passes around a sign-in sheet for folks to sign up for Beta testing the platform.

Questions/discussion with speaker:

- All in New Mexico? Yes. Piloting in Albuquerque. Open to expanding to the surrounding area. Intention is to go statewide and eventually national.
- Our hope is to go beyond the usual categories of donate, sign a petition, volunteer.
- We are offering a lot of hands-on support at this early stage.
- What is your timeline for the beta phase? Six months to a year. Some of it depends on funding. We are prioritizing development right now with the funding we have. We have a focus group coming up. Contact Charlie if interested.
- For-profit or nonprofit? We are structured as a B-Corp for-profit. Funding is from private family investment.
- Do you have a plan for broadening your reach? I do a lot of presentations. We also have had some publicity in the *Journal*. One-on-one, face-to-face marketing has been the best. We are conscious of wanting to represent the racial diversity of this region.
- Also happy to be a resource in developing the app for La Montañita.
- Code for Albuquerque is a group of volunteer technologists. offers to connect La Montañita with resources there.

Discussion, Organized by Topic/Theme:

Web-Based Tools

- Healthy Community Assessment Tool is a HUD-sponsored neighborhood level assessment tool with over 40 indicators of community health. It may be possible to use this tool as a form of increasing membership engagement.
 - We have some upcoming topics related to this tool. For example, in June on leveraging data. Public policy and regulation in October. Right now our City and County are updating our comprehensive plan. This is a tool they are using to help with that product. Only four cities have been piloting this tool, and Albuquerque is one of them.
 - Link: <http://HCAT.healthyplaces4nm.org> (hosted by Bernalillo County Place Matters, trying to use this tool to get folks involved in the land use conversation)
 - The impact measurements made available through the Healthy Community Initiative provides the opportunity for great results and Ends Reporting.
 - Healthy Community Assessment Tool Road Map - Identify different neighborhoods in Albuquerque and how they rank in terms of economic, social, and physical health.
- Basecamp is a project management tool that the Board uses to keep itself organized and to archive all documents.
- CivNet, as discussed, is a civic engagement platform.

Board and Co-op's Use of Online Platforms

Broader discussion about how platforms could complement what we are already doing and using.

- Basecamp is CivNet for the Board. Helps us organize committees and projects, as well as store documents, which is very important. We tried Sharepoint in the past, and Group Loop, but these were much clunkier. Over the past year, Board members are becoming more comfortable with Basecamp.
 - Board is using Basecamp as an archive system. It would be worthwhile to try to figure out how to engage people more, get them involved in more than posting the document for next month's meeting.
- CivNet strikes me as a cross between project management and social media. It seems like it might be more palatable for older generations (as well as others) than Facebook because it is more focused and purposeful.

- Co-op’s Marketing Director, Karolyn Cannata-Winge: We do have a La Montañita app through Genius Central. That contract comes up in July and we will not be renewing. We are developing our own app. The website is also going through a redesign and restructure. One goal is that member-owners be able to renew their membership online. CivNet could be a great tool for organizing our volunteers. We are also going to change how we use our social media and how that integrates with our website – a much bigger project. Karolyn is more than happy to receive ideas and suggestions. Karolyn also says she is interested in connecting with Charles (CivNet).

How Could Members Engage with Online Platforms?

- Using an app to check prices, compare to other stores. I think that would really benefit the customer. Price comparison.
- How representative are we in our community with who shops and who is hired? Online platforms could give that visibility and start a discussion. That has been a challenge we have had in an ongoing way.
- Virtual shopping would be an interesting option - where people can take a look at what is available in stores.
- Also it would be cool to track local products and produce. Where different producers’ products are being sold, and when.
 - QR codes that could be in the store - linking to info on products.
 - As a Board member, I’d appreciate not only featuring the products but the connection to the Ends, and also provide data on the results — like the \$\$ amount supporting the local economy in comparison to non-local products.
- I’d like to see a better way to get our deli hot bar specials online. That would be a good way to attract people to the stores for lunch.
- Also highlight some educational pieces - why we are not carrying certain things at certain times, why things cost what they do, the value of local, what is coming up.
- What do people think of some co-op food education online videos? Would people take advantage of it? Keep it short and sweet, and they can make sense on social media.
 - We do have a YouTube channel. We could do a teaser on social media, and then link to longer videos.
- Virtual shopping - Has the board looked at the High Planes Food Cooperative and the Oklahoma Food Cooperative? Their approach links urban and rural, and redefines what local means. It is done through an app and website. Interesting model we should look at as we think about the future of La Montanita. It could broaden the reach of the co-op.
- KidsCook could have little demos and could maybe be part of this effort. That would be one way for kids to think about shopping local and cooking fresh.
 - That is a partnership we are moving forward with.

Using Online Platforms to Make Board Meetings More Public?

- Would it be possible to live stream the Board meeting?
 - We once had a conversation about this, and our attorney cautioned us about it because of the opportunity for manipulation—but that was a long time ago. Could this be revisited now, maybe requiring a sign-in for members?
 - CivNet provides an opportunity to chime into the conversation.
 - It would help member-owners get to know who the Board members and staff leadership are. Reading the minutes is one thing, but it’s another to actually see faces and hear voices.
 - Also staff don’t want to come after working all day at the co-op, and also families with young children have a hard time coming at 5:30pm.

- We are also looking into having Board members logging in remotely. If we find a good service for this, it may open up the option of streaming more broadly.
 - If the Board is looking for assistance, there might be someone in the community who can spearhead this effort for you.
 - As a next step, we could start an action plan on CivNet that integrates a lot of this feedback.