

DGMT Quick Survey: Which online platforms do NGOs/PBOs value most?

July 2017

Purpose:

DGMT is in the process of developing a support package to assist public benefit organisations' online communication. We wanted to do a quick needs analysis to determine whether organisations would prefer support focused on the development of a social media strategy or on website development. We wanted to understand what drives their preference.

Methodology:

We constructed a four-question survey on Survey Monkey, which we marketed via Twitter and a boosted Facebook campaign. We also asked individuals to share the post with acquaintances working for NGOs and PBOs. Since we did not target NGO/PBO pages on Facebook, but reached out to individuals using social media in their personal capacity, we hope that bias towards organisations valuing social media to share their work has been somewhat limited, although it remains a possibility.

We added a fifth question after initial responses. Unfortunately, adding this question affected the understanding of our only qualitative question¹. Resultantly, in the analysis we treated responses as general commentary on experiences/opinions/needs in terms of website development and/or social media strategy.

Response rate:

After a two-day boosted campaign via Facebook, we had 168 responses to the survey.

Results:

1. Does your NGO/PBO have a website?



¹ The question asked if they stated that they prefer to have support on website development above the development of social media strategy or vice versa, if they could briefly explain their preference.

2. If yes, would you mind providing the URL for your website?

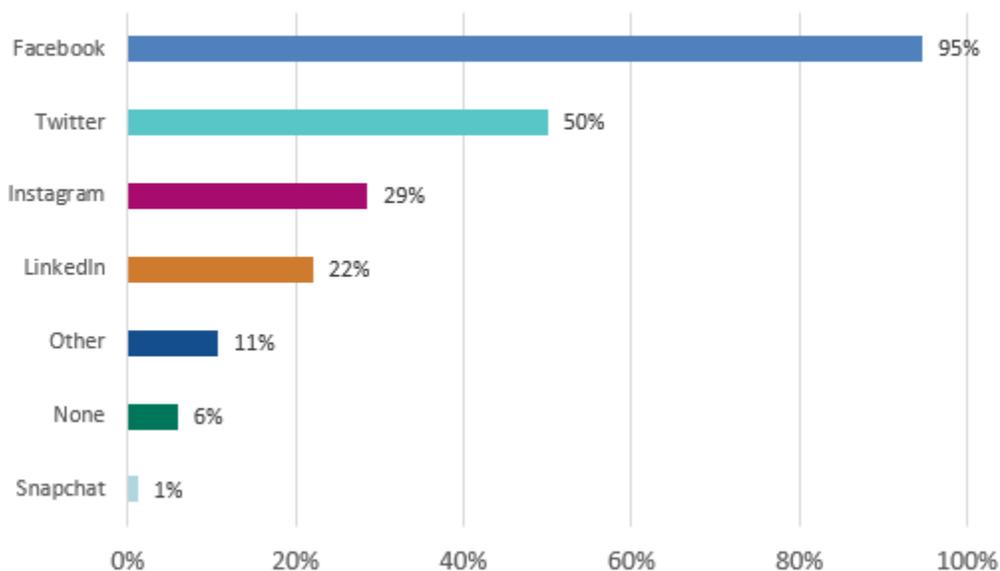
121 Organisations provided the URL for their website. We looked at the websites that people said they are satisfied with (16 websites) and at those that said they believe their website is outdated and needs to be improved (nine websites).

We did not systematically code these sites for features and usability, but as visitors, based on look and feel, it was hard to see a difference between these two groups. Overall, the brochure aspects of the websites were helpful and one regularly saw:

- Nice design
- Clear purpose statements and ‘About us’ sections
- Nice imagery and showcasing of inspiring work
- Clear instructions on how you can help or where you can donate

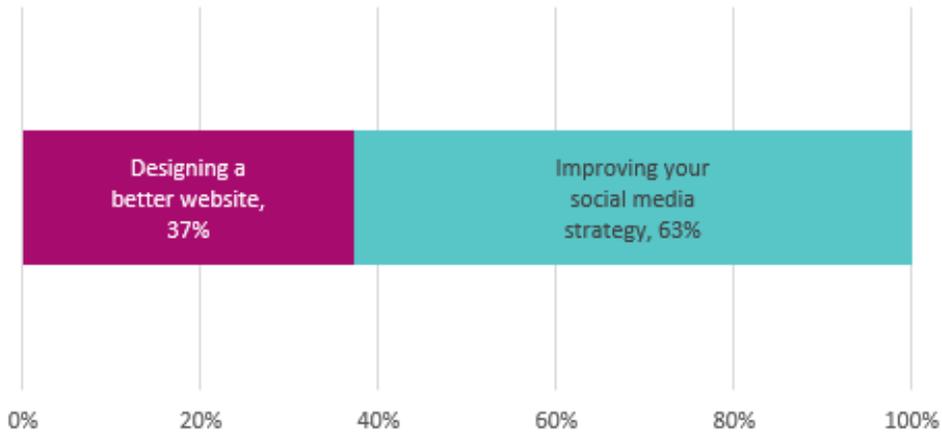
Those organisations that indicated that their websites are out of date were mostly referring to the “news” or “blog” sections, with most having last posted new content in 2016. Most of the websites that we looked at were static brochure sites, however, and thus rarely require updates. In some cases some improvements might be made in terms of information design, as it was rarely easy to, for example, locate annual reports.

3. Which social media platforms does your NGO/PBO use?



Most (94%) of the 168 organisations that responded to the survey are using social media for their work. Facebook is by far the most popular platform used by 95% of responding organisations. Comments on this (frequency = 7) mentioned that Facebook allows for longer posts, different post types and they are most comfortable using it.

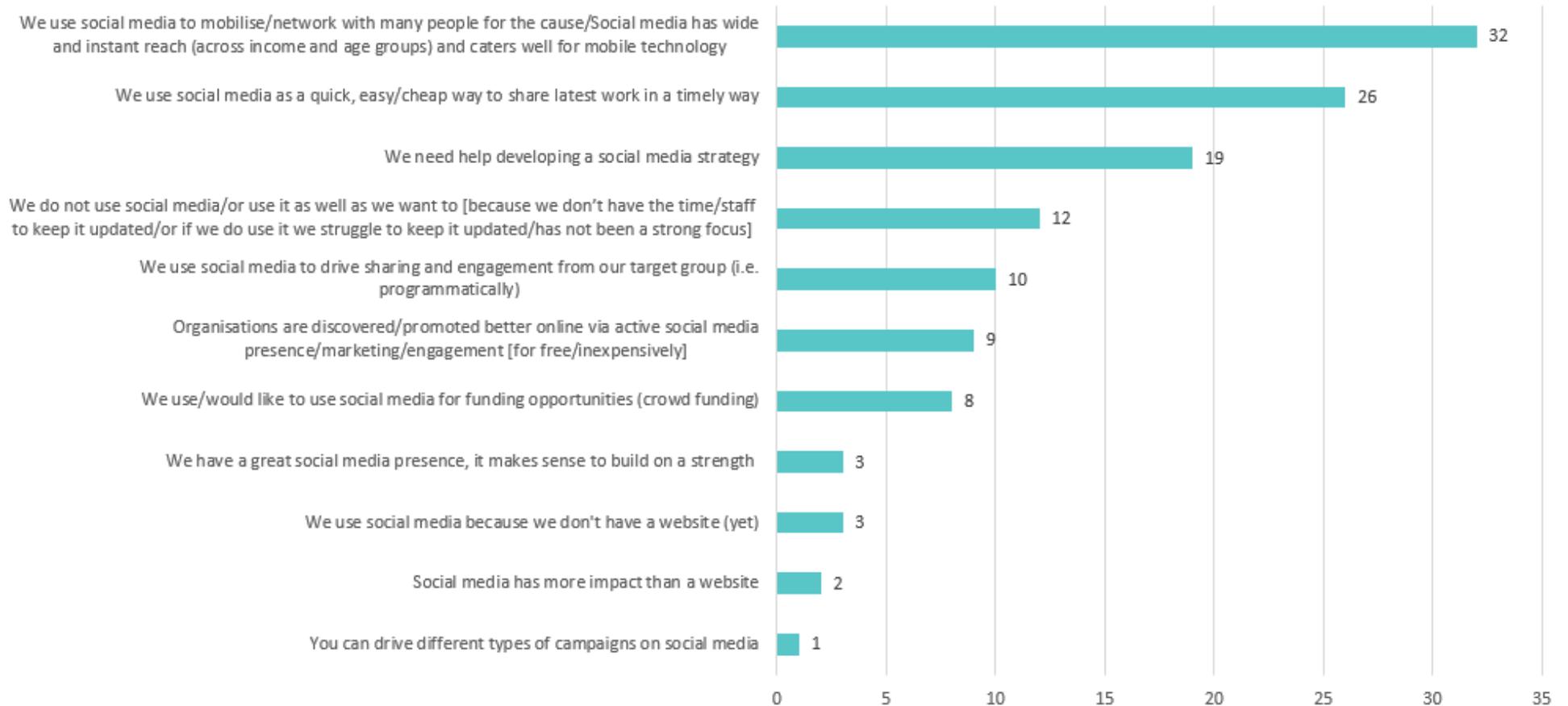
4. To which communication channel would your NGO/PBO sooner dedicate time and funds?



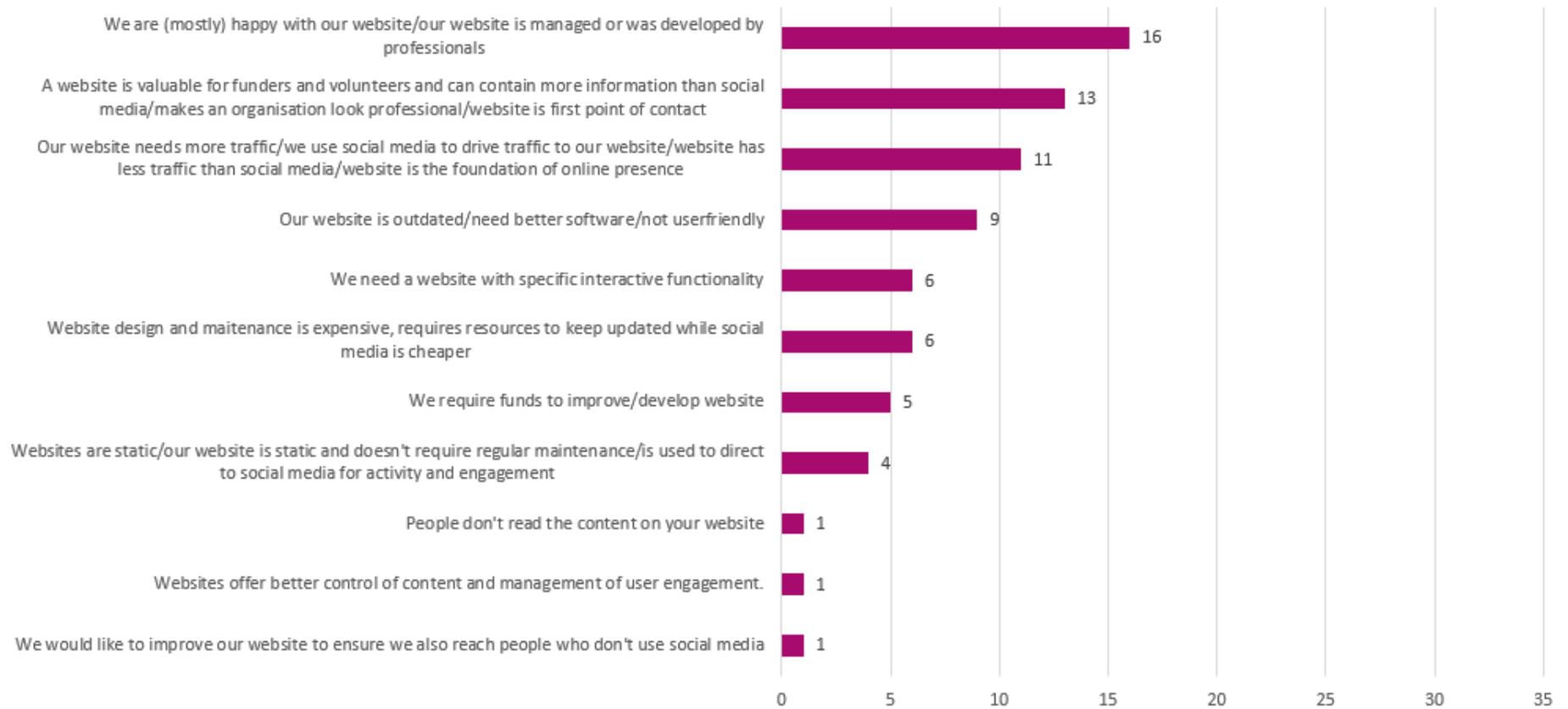
Nearly half of the organisations that don't have websites (43% of 35 organisations) indicated that despite not having a website, they would still rather channel time and funds to their social media strategy than towards a website.

Of the 130 organisations that do have websites, only 32% (41) said that they would rather spend time and resources to design a better website. Qualitative analysis of opinions regarding social media or websites revealed the following:

Comments about social media (frequency of a theme mentioned in commentary)



Comments about websites



Reflection and recommendations

Organisations responding to this survey are embracing social media, and especially Facebook, to share their activities and to engage with people, because of advantages such as:

- Large reach across various target/stakeholder groups

“We can actively reach more people through social media and drive different types of content/campaigns.”

“Our NGO is youth focused and specifically does youth advocacy work so social media typically works best for us to reach our audience and beneficiaries.”

“We are a community-based organisation, most people in our locations uses Facebook simply because it is cheaper and even the unemployed that we work with can be able to access it.”

- It is quick, easy to use with instant reach/feedback

“It is a time and budget issue. FB more accessible and easier.”

“Faster exposure to more people”

“Social media is faster and reaches more than a website.”

“Bigger and more instant reach”

- Free (or very cheap) form of marketing, which is especially important for crowd-based fundraising

“Another reason is that your organisation is likely to be found easier and ranked higher with an active social media appearance.”

“At present times the best social media strategy can help your organisation to survive.”

Although the importance of social media has definitely grown, both in terms of unique programmatic opportunity and in filling funding gaps, websites are still important. Most organisations have websites and they tend to associate it with having a more formal and professional presence that is needed to attract donors (i.e. reputational capital). As a funder we can confirm that an organisation’s website is often an important first introduction to us to the work of the organisation.

Where organisations were actively posting new information or sharing resources, a website was understood by a few as the foundation of an online presence with social media driving traffic to the website (which is also why some organisations said they needed help with their social media strategy). As one organisation mentioned, a website has the advantage of allowing for organised sharing or information and searching. This means that information shared on a website has a longer shelf life than that shared on social media.

“The link between social media and website is crucial in developing the brand. Our website should tell a story when we can't.”

“We believe that without good social media you don't get much traffic to your website, so it wouldn't matter how great your website was if no one visited it.”

“We have found that social media is good for keeping in contact and updating our stakeholders. Whereas our website is where organisations and people who are serious about getting involved go.”

“Website is more suitable to the donor and international audience, but not as user friendly or as up to the minute as our social media feed.”

However, websites are often mentioned to be expensive, with regular content development requiring additional resources/funds to be committed. Six organisations mentioned that they need websites with specialised functionality (like online training or sales).

Some organisations mentioned that the time and resources to produce updated, fresh content were issues for both websites and social media. A reasonable proportion of responding organisations described their websites as static, brochure sites without needing much upkeep.

“We simply do not have a person with the capacity or time to use these communication tools”.

“The website is easiest to maintain and does not require ongoing inputs from staff who are often busy. We do use Facebook but social media updates can become difficult to manage”.

Recommendations:

Whether it is to drive traffic to more active websites that share resources, to integrate all their online platforms so that they are complementary, or to use social media simply for the advantages they offer programmatically and to fill funding gaps, the biggest need expressed by participating organisations are for support in developing social media strategy. However, the important advantages of a website (even if it is a brochure website) should not be ignored and organisations should receive support that considers their entire online presence and their digital needs as a whole.

In terms of **websites**, it is very important that they are mobile friendly, load quickly and have a high google ranking (which will help people to find them easier and implies that the site should have a SSL certificate). Organisations also need to use Google analytics effectively to understand what is driving traffic to their site and how their different online profiles interact². Online tools for website design offers a cheap (and mobile friendly) solution for brochure websites (which some participating organisations are already using).

In terms of **social media**, many people find it easy to use, but to use it effectively to drive programming or even fundraising requires a lot of technical understanding of the landscape - system algorithms seem mysterious and can create a hit-and-miss effect. Often organisations still need to

² <https://smartcausedigital.com/articles/10-stats-you-should-know-about-nonprofit-websites-2017>;
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pay to ensure that content is effectively shared, which makes understanding the social media landscape and having a social media strategy all the more important³.

Support on content development (more than basic communication of brochure information) will be helpful for both website and social media. Developing high quality content in a context of limited time and resources is challenging for many organisations (including DGMT).

³ <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/nonprofit-social-media-guide/>