



i can. i will. i do.

Like Facebook, Love Your Community

A Guide to Using Facebook with WIC Clients

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The Facebook Way

Introduction

With 75% of the millennial population (born roughly between the early 80s and mid-90s) actively using Facebook and other social networking sites on a daily basis to communicate and share their lives with friends and family, it has become more evident than ever that a window of opportunity exists for the WIC program—and its access to a vast network of mothers within this population—to tap into this social networking tool to create and sustain a respected and trusted online community.

A community made up of WIC clients searching for meaningful friendship and support, especially at a time when they are facing the challenging task of becoming a new parent or simply struggling to raise healthy kids they already have.

For WIC clients, finding others who share their struggle or who have experience in overcoming the obstacles they are facing is not always easy. But by providing an online resource—a destination where mothers can connect and belong to something greater than themselves—suddenly where to go and who to talk with when facing WIC-related health and parenting issues lessens the burden.

Within this community they help create, mothers have people ready and willing to listen. They find friendship and virtually surround themselves with a community of people who genuinely care about their well-being. It's a community that can be accessed from practically anywhere. Clients aren't restricted by office hours, the cost of gas, a limited bus schedule, or finding a babysitter. They can literally take this community with them wherever they go. They have access from their car or a bus using a mobile device, from the library, while visiting parents or friends, or from the comfort of their own home. The tools are there and the possibilities are endless.

Breaking Away from the Old Ways

Having the proper tools to make a difference and knowing how to use them effectively are two very separate issues. Often when new technologies are introduced and become mainstream, organizations implement them in ways that resemble older methods in which they are accustomed. Unfortunately, many use a Facebook page to act as a sort of email Listserv where news and information is shared on an irregular basis, like when there is an announcement or if someone needs a response to an inquiry. To use Facebook or other social media tools in this way is to underutilize their full potential and neglect the prospect of establishing an active and supportive community. So if you're contemplating jumping on the social media bandwagon, make sure you're prepared to allocate enough resources to launch and engage an online community long-term. There's nothing more disappointing to an active community member than to see their trusted community become a ghost town.

So how do you foster a truly effective Facebook community? Well, to have a complete understanding of what is involved, let's start by taking a look at the two main components Facebook offers.

Facebook Pages and Groups

When we talk about *Facebook communities*, we are essentially referring to two distinct categories: *Pages* and *Groups*. It's important to understand the differences between the two as they both have their own benefits and shortcomings.

A Little Bit About Groups

Three words. *Groups* are private. I know it's hard to believe because Facebook seems so public and in your face. But *Facebook Groups* provide an excellent way for peer counselors to share information or ideas and have discussions in private. This is especially important when dealing with topics that some clients may find uncomfortable displaying on their wall for all their friends and family to see.

In order to join a *Group* you need to be invited. After that, what happens in the *Group*, stays in the *Group*. It doesn't get posted to your main wall for everyone in your Facebook world to see. Clients, WIC staff and peer counselors can participate as much or little as they want. *Group* members can adjust their notifications so they receive an email every time another group member leaves a post or makes a comment. If that becomes overkill,

which can happen in an active *Group*, members can turn off email notifications and do a manual check whenever they want to see what people are saying in their *Group*.

Another key feature among *Groups* is the group chat function. Online chats can be described as talking by typing. Within *Groups*, all members can engage in a single chat window at the same time. It's possible the chat could become a bit noisy with many people trying to message at once, but sufficient moderation by WIC staff or a peer counselor can help curb the noise.

Groups also offer the ability to send a message to all *Group* members at once. Members are notified of these messages via email or a notification they see after they log in to their Facebook account. These messages appear and live in their Facebook inbox.

Two other *Group* features worth noting are the ability to share photos by creating and uploading images to an album, which can only be seen by those inside the *Group* and Facebook *Questions*, a tool that makes it possible to pose questions to *Group* members in an open-ended or multiple choice format. This is an excellent way to collect and analyze information about your members.

The downside to *Groups* is they are not as feature-rich as *Pages*. There aren't separate areas for videos or discussion boards and third party applications—add-ons you can install to add functionality to your Facebook Page—are not available to *Groups*. It's mostly just a single wall where items get posted. So over time, finding a specific video or link can become difficult to do.

Groups also lack community statistical tracking that's available for *Pages*. This makes evaluating content and group interaction much more difficult.

A Little Bit About Pages

Pages are public spaces where WIC states or local agencies can communicate and offer a positive and supportive environment for WIC clients on Facebook. Any mom can "Like" a page, which adds her to that page's community. It provides a place where photos, videos, links, and discussions can be organized and shared with the community. Interactive, third-party applications can also be added, such as contests, quizzes, and live video feeds. These type of applications can help kickstart and engage your community.

Unlike *Groups*, there is no chat function available for *Page* members to communicate directly with each other unless they happen to also be Facebook friends. And the *Page* administrator can't deliver messages to the Facebook inbox of their members unless they are Facebook friends.

Read more about setting up your own Facebook *Page* by viewing the official *Page* manual (<https://facebook-inc.box.net/shared/9e5jiyl843>).

So Which Is Better?

As you can see, neither option is perfect—both have their pros and cons. So the truth is, the best approach is to consider using both, especially since one can be based on the other. In order to launch a *Group*, you need a “parent” *Profile*. You can use the *Profile* that was used to build the *Page*. This will give you a base from which to invite people and provide you with a more human connection. Thus, after setting up a peer counseling *Page* you can set up a private sub-*Group* based on that *Page* and even link to that *Group* from the *Page*. The two really do go hand in hand.

Community Building Techniques

Many of the techniques below can apply to both *Pages* and *Groups*, although the manner in which you implement them is a bit different depending on which you're using. It's important to get your hands wet with each type of community so you have a complete understanding of how to apply the techniques to each of them.

Use Updates to Create Conversations

Many organizations aren't clear about how best to utilize “status” updates and end up not using them at all, leaving their *Group* or *Page* to become stagnate; update in a repetitive style, solely posting items such as announcements or links; or update so often that their followers get overwhelmed by what has now become noise. So it's important to find that sacred balance between posting too much and not enough, as well as ensuring there is a focused variety of content being passed along to your community. In terms of frequency, posting something new at least every couple of days should get you there. It's important to experiment with different amounts, as well as the timing of those posts. You may find as many as 4 or 5 posts every day elicits the greatest number of responses from your members.

When it comes time to actually posting a status, keep the tone casual and informative. Show your community members there is a human face behind the page by working hard to exhibit an inviting personality. This will help build engagement and trust among your community members. Share things such as cooking demonstration videos, blog posts from mothers who have overcome breastfeeding challenges, inspiring quotes, healthy recipes, or book reviews relevant to the group.

Create a conversation with your members by posting a friendly welcome message when new members join or encouraging discussion among your members with questions like, “What is your favorite healthy recipe that uses ingredients from the WIC food package?” Get their input, ask their opinion, and collect a variety of perspectives simply by engaging in a conversation with your members. Send out periodic messages to your group using the Facebook messaging system and encourage them to invite other friends who are also part of the WIC program.

And what about the comments your clients leave? Well, they can be equally as important as the original content piece itself by providing an opportunity for you to go back and forth in a conversation. As soon as content is posted, check back frequently to observe feedback about the post in real-time. Track the “likes” you receive and note the number of positive and negative comments for each update. Make adjustments to what you post according to what you find. By listening to your members you will gain a firm understanding of their interests and concerns, enabling you to share content they actually want to see and read. Using Facebook *Questions* is a great way to ask questions and get instant feedback on whatever topic you choose. Take advantage of these tools. You may be surprised at which content proves to be successful and resonates the most with your clients.

Finally, don’t forget to keep it fun! Don’t be afraid to post things that are unrelated to breastfeeding or nutrition. Post videos, photos and other updates that inspire, motivate, and make your members both laugh and feel good to be a part of your community.

Manage Your Updates with a Schedule

So I know what you’re thinking - there’s no way you have enough time to post quality content on a daily basis or even every other day. It’s a legitimate concern. Managing a successful online community can certainly chew up a significant amount of time. With a

little planning and by using the right tools you can significantly decrease the amount of time you spend posting updates to your community.

You can use free tools like Tweetdeck (www.tweetdeck.com) and Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com) to pre-schedule your updates. Just plan your schedule using a simple calendar-like grid as seen in Figure 1. and spend a couple hours each week loading all your updates for the upcoming week.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
7:00am							
8:00am	Inspirational quote	Inspirational video	Inspirational quote	Inspirational video	Inspirational quote	Shopping tips	
9:00am	Off topic question of the week		Breastfeeding Tip of the Week		Movie/book recommendation		
10:00am							
11:00am							
12:00pm	Dinner recipe	How would you handle this...	Dinner recipe	Healthy snack ideas	Dinner recipe		
1:00pm							
2:00pm							
3:00pm						Dinner conversation starter	

Figure 1: Weekly status update schedule

Fit Updates Into Your Client’s Schedule

If you want to get the most out of your update messages, learn when your community members are checking in on Facebook. Is it before and after work? During lunch time? On the weekends? You can gather this information by noticing when comments are made, or from your Facebook *Page* stats (Facebook Insights - <http://developers.facebook.com/docs/insights>). Your stats will show how many page views are generated at different times. So if you find your members tend to check in regularly first thing in the morning between 8:00 and 9:00 then you can plan to consistently post an early morning message to take advantage of that traffic.

Foster That Community Feeling

Administrators have control over how much their members can interact with the page. They can limit interaction to comments and “Likes” on broadcasted updates or they can broaden the scope of interaction by allowing and encouraging users to add photos, videos, and their own updates. Naturally, with the latter route you will need to allocate WIC staff or peer counselor time to monitor the wall regularly and remove any items that are inappropriate or offensive. The pay off is building member loyalty and trust and potentially increasing the amount of engaging content you’ll find in your community. If you’re concerned about what your members might post, you can always list community rules that outline what is and is not allowed.

So open up your page for at least a trial period and see what happens. When members visit a wall full of positive comments and engaging content, they develop good feelings about the community and frequently end up “Liking” and commenting on posts left by people they don’t even know. This generates a powerful sense of community.

Harnessing Discussions

Facebook *Discussions* are similar to forums that appear elsewhere on the web. It provides a way for stories and side conversations to be captured and contained in a single area. So, let’s say, for example, you publish a status update that receives a lot of positive feedback. Odds are that conversation won’t end because it’s no longer interesting. Rather what’s more likely is that it will end because it’s no longer visible on the wall. A situation like this is an opportunity to begin a Topic in the *Discussions* area to foster members to continue the conversation. *Discussions* don’t get published to the wall. They are housed in a space where members can easily find and reference them in the future. *Page* administrators can also link to the discussion if it becomes a resource worth referring to down the road.

You can use status updates to invite your members to begin checking the *Discussions* area regularly and can even encourage members with whom you have a relationship to start topics on their subject of expertise. One example of using *Discussions* involves having a Facebook page for WIC staff and peer counselors to interact with each other. Counselors can submit client stories within the *Discussion* area, both the successful and not-so-successful kind. Others can comment on these stories and provide praise or offer suggestions on how to address similar situations in the future. Over time the client stories

will accumulate and can help serve as a training resource when new counselors join the program.

One of the benefits of being an administrator is that all participants of a comment thread are notified when you respond to that thread. Use this to your advantage by commenting on discussions. Doing so increases the odds of your members coming back to the *Discussions* page to continue the conversation.

Events

Posting an *Event* allows administrators to bring attention to live trainings or virtual gatherings that are offered to community members. *Events* can be posted in both *Groups* and *Pages* (although *Pages* keeps all events in a separate *Events* area) whereas *Groups* posts the event to the wall and over time that event may go unnoticed as it moves down the wall. *Events* provide an excellent opportunity to take and upload event-related photos and video to your page, especially if they include your community members.

Multimedia

Photos and videos make for some of the most engaging content on Facebook. But how do you use this type of content effectively to build a community?

Photos should be arranged in logical albums so members can easily sift through what you have posted. Tag photos or videos of people in your group. This notifies the tagged person and acts as a carrot to draw them back to the group, helping to maintain their connection.

You can use photos or video clips to introduce your peer counselors, provide demonstrations or tutorials, or even conduct a virtual tour of your clinic or agency. The possibilities are only limited by your imagination. And keep in mind the quality is less important than the content. Studio quality media isn't necessary. Being helpful, honest, and real will get your members to overlook any obvious, amateur camera skills.

Think Different with Your Design

When you first visit Oxfam's Facebook *Page* you are presented with a custom welcome page (see Figure 2). This includes a bold image and multiple calls to action (Join community, learn more, act now, and shop). This strategy can provide an excellent way to direct members to your local or state WIC website or get them to subscribe or sign up for a particular service or event.

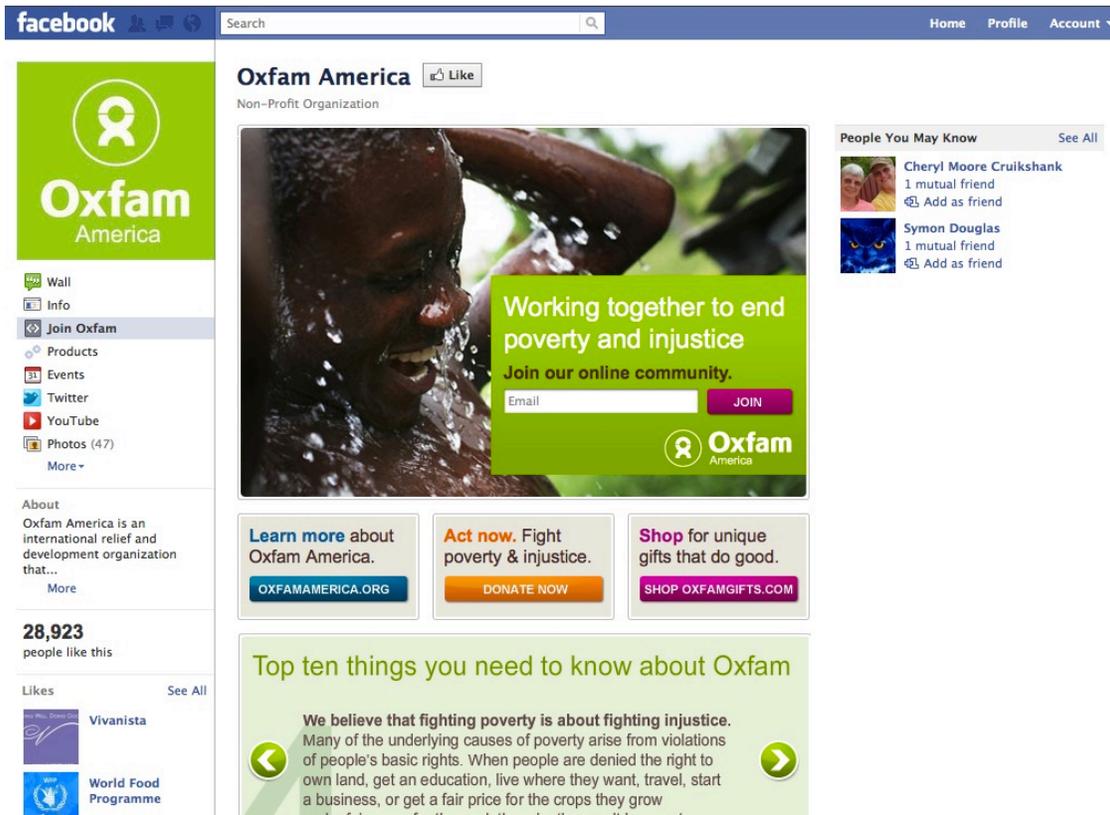


Figure 2: Oxfam's creative use of a custom welcome page with calls to action.

For example, integrating this with the wichealth.org suite of products could include having a welcome page for the Virtual Peer Counselor program that displays several calls to action such as “visit wichealth,” “subscribe to text messaging” or “make appointment with a peer counselor.”

A welcome page can also highlight some of the best items submitted by your members like the *Fan Highlights* section on the Coca Cola welcome page below (see Figure 3). This area showcases some of the best photos uploaded by their members. This is an excellent strategy for recognizing your members and inspiring them to create and submit high-quality content.

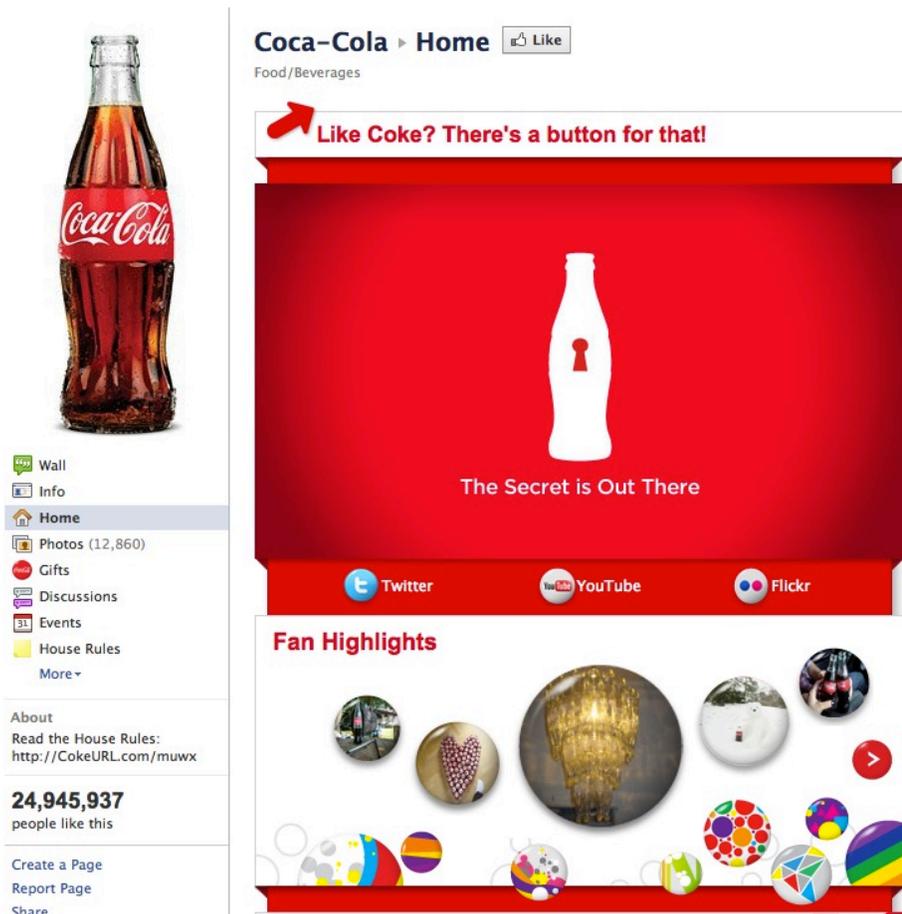


Figure 3: Coca Cola showcases fan photos on their welcome page.

One final example shows how you can use your profile picture (left column) area to spotlight one of your members (see Figure 4). This area could also be used to highlight an important event or announcement such as an upcoming conference or training.



Figure 4: The profile picture is used to highlight a community member.

A successful Facebook community has tremendous potential to provide the much needed support WIC clients need as they work through breastfeeding and parenting issues. With adequate planning and a well thought out approach to engaging your clients, your local WIC program has the ability to add another dimension to the support and educational services already being provided. So start small, start simple, and start now. Your clients are online and you should be too.