

Advocacy through Email, Internet and Social Media

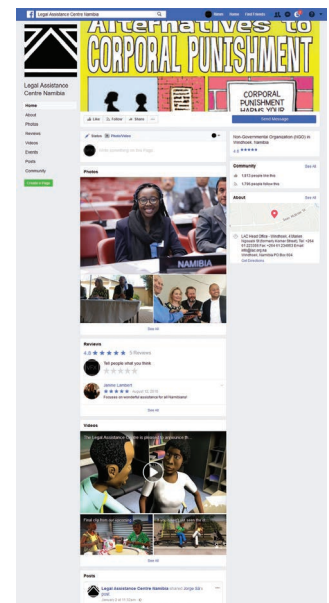


Online tools are an effective way to share information with many people in different locations quickly and cheaply. You can use most of the methods described here to provide information, photos, videos and notices about events to many people at once. “Online” refers to accessing materials through the internet, which is a global system of interconnected computers. You can access the internet with a “smartphone” (a cellphone that has internet capacity), a computer or similar electronic equipment.

Email: The term “email” is short for “electronic mail”, which goes between cellphones or computers, usually over telephone lines. You can use email to correspond with other individuals and groups that have email addresses. You can attach documents and photographs to emails. This allows you to transfer large amounts of information very quickly and cheaply - but be careful that your email is not too large in size or it may not go through. When you receive an email from someone, you can delete it, file it in your cellphone or computer, print it out (if you connect to a printer), reply to it or forward it to other people. You can do several of these things in a very short space of time. This flexibility makes email very useful. You can set up a contact group which contains multiple email addresses under one group address to make it even easier to send out information to many people at once.

SMSs and WhatsApp: These are both inexpensive methods for sending short messages with your cellphone to one person, or to a group that includes many recipients. These methods have the same advantages as email. Anyone with a cellphone number can send SMSs (also referred to as text messages or texts). You need a “smartphone” with internet capacity to use WhatsApp for sending short messages, and you must download the relevant application onto your smartphone first. There are other similar messaging services that you can use with a smartphone.

Social media: The term “social media” refers to various online platforms such as **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **YouTube**. You can use these tools to communicate directly with large numbers of people about your issue, throughout Namibia and all over the world. People who “follow” you on these platforms are those who arrange to see your messages. You can use these platforms to engage in discussions with people who agree or disagree with your views, to attract support for your issue, or to build a community of people who want to become involved with your work. The three examples listed here are popular in Namibia, along with others such as **Instagram** and **Pinterest**. Note that there are many online platforms, and that the online world changes rapidly.



Facebook: www.facebook.com

Facebook is the world’s largest social networking site. It is highly interactive. Individuals or organisations can create a profile page and then use Facebook to –

- post news or information
- plan and promote events
- share photos and videos
- react to posts of information by others.

All of these actions take place on the Facebook platform, and are visible to people who are following you or your organisation online.



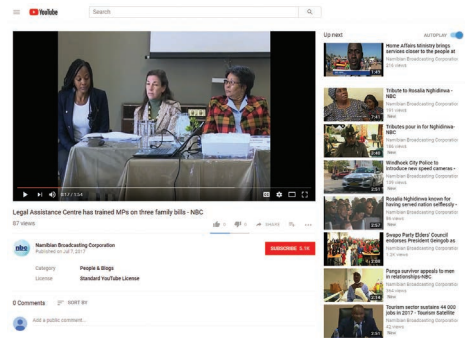
Twitter: www.twitter.com

Twitter works in a similar way to telephone text messages, but it takes place on an internet platform which enables large numbers of people to quickly find and share information. Users can create a profile, invite people to follow their messages and follow the messages of others. Twitter posts are called “Tweets” and are restricted to 280 letters, numbers or other characters. Within that limit, users can share text, links and images. They can also include a short “hashtag” (a short label which starts with the symbol#) to categorize their message and make it easy for interested people to find and follow the discussion. For example, you might use the hashtag “#saveourrhinos” or “#endnamibianpoverty”. Other Twitter users can react to your tweet, forward it to others (“retweet” it), or reply to it. Popular users may have millions of followers.



YouTube: www.youtube.com

YouTube is the world’s leading video-sharing site. It is a collection of videos on many topics, including videos produced by amateurs and professionals. Anyone with a smartphone can produce a video and upload it to YouTube. Organisations can create “channels” which interested people can follow regularly. They can also follow the channels of other groups engaged in similar issues. You can give your video a descriptive title and tag it with a keyword that explains what it is about, so that people can easily search for it online. A YouTube video can easily be shared through other online platforms.



To decide what platform is right for your organisation, look on social media for other groups engaged in similar work. Ask members of your target audience what social media they like best. Most social media platforms have monitoring tools which can tell you how many people are reading, reacting to and sharing your information.

Create a website or blog: You can create a basic website for yourself or your organisation very easily and cheaply. A website is a bit like a booklet about you or your group which people can read online. You may be able to set up a website for free, by using formats which have been created for this purpose. A blog is a bit like a public journal or newspaper, where you write short articles and make them available online. One long-standing source of free website or blog frameworks is **Wordpress** (<https://wordpress.org> or <https://wordpress.com>). You can put a small website or blog on your own computer with this tool. You can provide links to your website on many social media platforms. It is important to keep your website up-to-date with new information if you want people to visit it regularly. ■

TIPS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY

To use social media and online resources effectively, you need a clear and consistent message. If you have a logo or a special set of colours that identifies your organisation, use these regularly to “brand” your material. You need to post interesting, accurate and relevant information. Include exciting visuals whenever possible. Try to communicate your passion for your issue as well as relevant facts and statistics.

You might use an online presence for a single short campaign. If you want to keep people interested over a longer time period, you will need to be sure that you provide new items regularly. Good content is important if you want to engage your audience. Try to think creatively. Use online platforms to let people know who you are, what you do and what services or resources you can provide. Remember that your information may be read by many different people, including grassroots communities, politicians or potential funders.

Because electronic communications are so quick and easy, sometimes people do not take the same care with them as they would with a letter. You will look more professional if you write carefully and clearly. Be careful not to send out a message that you will regret later on. If you are writing about a sensitive matter, it is always a good idea to compose your message, then wait a while and re-read it before you send or post it. Online communications do not convey emotions as well as face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations. You must write carefully to be understood. Do not say anything online that you would not say to someone face-to-face.

Remember that what you put online about yourself or your group creates a powerful image of who you are. Be sure that this image is the one that you want.