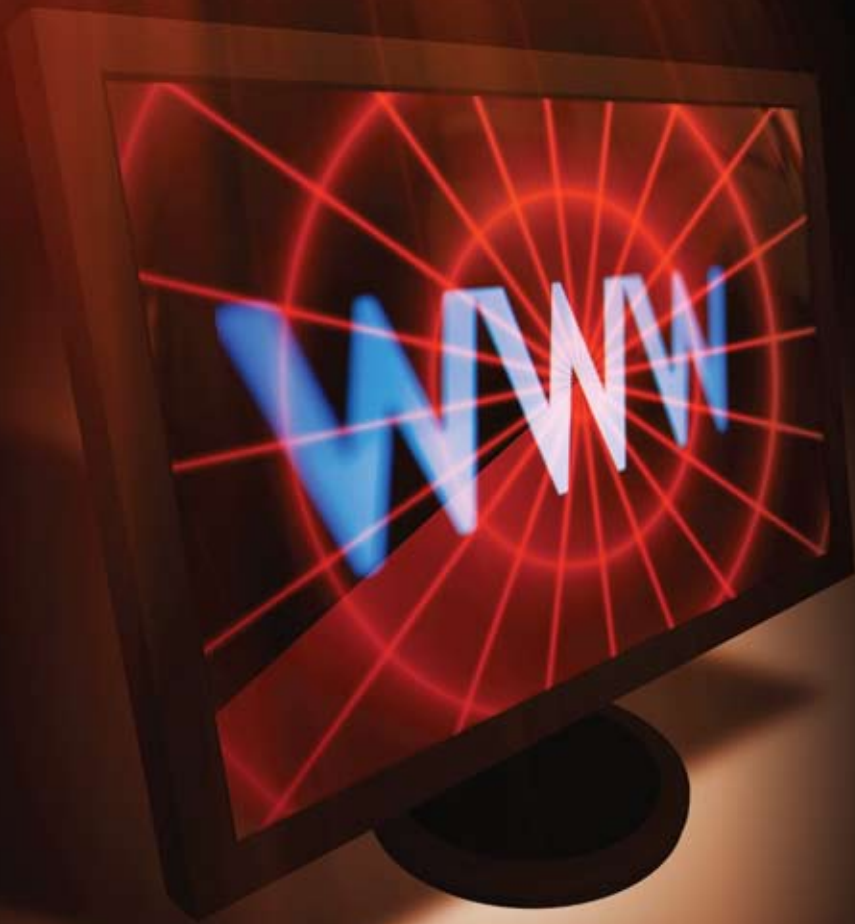


WHAT TECH CAN DO FOR YOUR CHORUS



Even smaller choruses are discovering the benefits of an enhanced media presence



BY KATIE WANSCHURA

No place is technology-free. It's hard to go anywhere without seeing someone wearing the ubiquitous white iPod earbuds or a BlackBerry cradled lovingly in hand. People talking to themselves on the streets are now, more often than not, sporting a Bluetooth headset alight the side of their heads. Even hikers on remote trails can bring a GPS tracker with them for directions and safety.

New technologies are certainly out there, but how can we harness and implement them for the benefit of choruses? How can we make technology work for us? ►

What Tech Can Do for Your Chorus

continued

The use of technology can help your ensemble to not only publicize its concerts and programs, but also to provide singers with supplemental resources and to promote your brand to the public. “eTools,” like emailer programs, websites, podcasting, and YouTube, abound to help you expand your reach and improve musicianship in ways that were previously impossible. Here is a summary of recent technologies that you can employ to enhance the media profile of your chorus.

eTool 1: Emailer Programs

An important aspect of technology is using it to help leverage the assets you already have. Hopefully, one of the things you already have is an email list for your patrons. If not, ask attendees at your next concert to share their email contact information so that you can be in touch about future activities. Consider emailing everyone who bought tickets online to help build your

once or multiple times. Different emailer programs provide varying levels of customization to increase the chance that your email will be opened.

Once you have this data, you can use it to shape your next offer. For example, if half of your recipients received a 10 percent discount off concert admission and half received a five-dollar discount, you can see which offer was more appealing and use this information to tailor future offers.

Overall, emailer programs can help you mine the data you already have and can provide invaluable insight into the interests and habits of your audience.

eTool 2: Websites

Having a presence on the Internet is of vital importance today. While it’s nearly impossible for an individual not to have an online footprint of some sort, what about your ensemble? Smaller organizations may find themselves with a small web presence, especially in an organization with an all-volunteer staff. However, even for smaller groups, a website is still a must-have.

A website can provide patrons with detailed concert descriptions, donation options, and resources to help audiences learn more about the chorus and the music you perform. Also, there’s always a chance that someone searching for performances of Eric Whitacre’s music might stumble across a news announcement of your performance of “Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine” and come to your concert just for that reason.

A microsite (a site within the full website) gives your visitors a “one-stop shop” to learn about a specific program. The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, for example, launched a microsite (<http://www.bsomusic.org/Mass>) devoted to regional performances of Bernstein’s *Mass*. This microsite presents program notes, biographical information, and the complete text of the libretto. The multimedia area contains video and sound clips as well as a link to a podcast, all aimed at increasing the audience’s knowledge and appreciation for the piece.

Websites not only allow you to market your concerts and programs, but they can also provide singers with resources such as rehearsal schedules and score markings, and information about activities, retreats, or planned performances.

If your chorus doesn’t have a website, you can create one using one of many free options that do not require much web expertise.

The Lesbian & Gay Chorus of Washington (<http://www.lgcw.org>) prepares a weekly newsletter, *The Rag*, that is posted in downloadable format on the LGCW website and is distributed to singers at rehearsal. The simple two-page layout includes detailed rehearsal schedules for the current week and the next week, concert logistics with seating guides, and relevant upcoming events. It also serves as an additional space to thank donors and recognize sponsors.

“One of the primary purposes of our newsletter is to promote efficiency in rehearsals. The fewer announcements we have to make verbally, the more time we have to make music together,” says LGCW music director C. Paul Heins.

“We use the online version of *The Rag* as a go-to resource for singers who are absent from rehearsals. In addition to keeping them abreast of our rehearsal accomplishments (and encouraging them to stay on track with those accomplishments), it also keeps them informed of the various nonmusicmaking activities that are important to the sense of community we nurture in our chorus.”

As with everything on the Internet, current data is the key. Once your site is up, make sure to keep your concert and season information up-to-date. This way audience members and potential supporters who use your site will not give up trying to find what they need when they need it—ticket information, directions, concert program details, etc.

If your chorus doesn’t have a website, you can create one using one of many free options that do not require much web expertise, including Freewebs (<http://members.freewebs.com>), Weebly (<http://www.weebly.com>), and Yahoo’s Geocities (<http://geocities.yahoo.com>). Each of these sites will guide you through the process of setting up your new website. ►

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email address list further. Track down email addresses for singers who have moved on from the ensemble. Each email address represents someone who could pass on your concert or programming information to another person who could support you.

Emailer programs have a number of advantages over sending your promotions out via Outlook or Gmail. These programs can track detailed information about the campaign you launch, such as the number of recipients who opened the email, the email addresses of those who opened it, the links in the email that recipients clicked on, and whether they clicked on the links

eTool 3: Social Networking Sites

Once your organization has an online presence and you are ready to branch out, explore some of the social networking sites to reach new audiences. You can set up an account for free on MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com>) or Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) relatively quickly.

MySpace is great for sharing music, but make sure you are aware of all the copyright restrictions associated with the specific piece you want to post. MySpace also allows easy browsing—you do not need to become a member to peek around. Facebook is a better venue for issuing invitations to concerts or events, but you must be a Facebook member to send invitations to other Facebook users.

Singer Network (<http://www.singernet-work.org>), a service of Chorus America, allows choral singers across the world to interact with one another, discuss issues pertaining to singing, post upcoming choral events and recordings listings, and allows users access to relevant articles about choral singing, vocal health, and repertoire. Since most choruses need to use their organizational websites for public access to tickets and programs rather than for social networking, Singer Network provides a simple, cost-effective alternative for your singers.

eTool 4: Podcasting

Podcasting is often called the new radio. A podcast, simply put, is recording similar to a radio broadcast that is housed on a website and has the capacity to be subscribed to and downloaded. Audio on a website does not become a podcast until it is recurring and “subscribable.”

Podcasting offers a great venue for organizations to reach their members and potential audience. There are generally three types of podcasts related to performing arts organizations: “radio” performance, self-produced, and third-party.

“Radio” performance podcasts are podcasts that sound like a CD or radio (not talk radio) and don’t include

commentary or even introductions, in some cases. One of the few choral “radio” podcasts I’ve found is offered through Magnatune at <http://magnatune.com/podcasts/choral>.

A self-produced podcast is created, edited, and produced within your organization. It may include background or audition information, details related to the current or upcoming concert, resources for singers or members only, or interviews and commentary. This type of podcast allows your organization to retain full control of the artistic design and content.

The Oratorio Society of New York (<http://www.oratoriosocietyofny.org>) offers podcast rehearsal recordings for its singers. Subscribers to the alto broadcast, for example, are periodically sent podcasts that enable them to listen to and download their parts when learning new pieces.

A third-party podcast is a podcast developed off-site by an individual not connected with your organization. Though these podcasts can be music- or singing-related, your chorus loses control over the precise content and artistic merit of the podcast because they are independently produced.

For choruses without the time, money, or inclination to produce podcasts, third-party podcasts can be an excellent resource. Established third-party podcasters have technical capabilities and knowledge that novice podcasters do not, and their podcasts often have a larger targeted impact because they reach a wider audience base.

For example, CASA, the Contemporary A Cappella Society (<http://www.casa.org>), offers an “A Cappella Originals” podcast showcasing different groups, while 4-cast (<http://4-cast.tv>) only produces barbershop harmony podcasts.

If you fit their niche, podcasts like these can be a great way to gain exposure for your group.

eTool 5: YouTube

As more people get Wi-Fi, DSL, and cable modems, online video becomes a more common and viable option for outreach. YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>) is one of the latest sensations in this area and allows anyone to upload any original video for streaming. You must be a member to upload videos, but you do not have to be a member to view videos.

Numerous choral videos are available on YouTube. Watch the Gay Men’s Chorus of Los Angeles perform Verdi’s “Anvil Chorus” with subtitles and an impressive anvil trio. Follow that by watching Straight No Chaser sing the “Twelve Days of Christmas,” and close with the London Community Gospel Choir at Gospelfest in Amsterdam.

Tools for video editing are not as plentiful as audio editing. However, it can be done without too much effort in iMovie (for Apple computers) or Movie Maker (for Windows). You will need a video camera or digital camera capable of making movies. Once you have the tools, the financial costs are minimal, but the time required is significant.

Visit the YouTube website for instructions on uploading your video. Be advised that you must own the rights to your video to upload it.

Look into the Future

The capacities of and usages for technology are growing everyday. Already there are billboards in California that adjust their advertisements depending on the radio station that the majority of passing cars is playing. Similarly, maybe one day audiences will be able to instantly text-in their evaluation of a concert while following along with text translations on their iPhones (and let’s hope their ring tones are muted!).

No matter what the future holds, there are relatively simple technologies that can provide you with effective tools for reaching new audience members, new singers, and new board members today. Who knows? One day you may find your chorus on YouTube with a couple thousand views to your name. ■

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