Executive Summary

“Sunshine Horses” is a volunteer organization that is a not-for-profit horse sanctuary and adoption program. The primary goal of the organization is to help horses find their “forever home”, while also giving people the opportunity to learn about horse care in a safe and structured environment. One of the main goals of the organization is to allow people to realize their potentials in horse care and general responsibility while also establishing heart-warming connections with these horses.

Sunshine Horses is centered in Central New York with stables located in Syracuse, New York and Memphis, New York. The organization was established in 2003, and has been expanding consistently since its establishment. Sunshine Horses specialized in Standard-bred racehorses, but has also been welcome to a wide range of other breeds. Generally, horses come into the program because they aren’t skillful enough to be successful on the racetrack. Occasionally, they have simply become too old to race, or they have developed an injury preventing them to do so. The organization attempts to teach each capable horse to ride with a saddle, while also trying their best to match each unique horse to the needs of potential adopters.

The organization has also made strides in becoming involved within the community. Sunshine Horses is involved with many youth programs and adult volunteer programs which offer the participants personal growth and enrichment through equine interaction.

The organization has been doing pretty well in the past few years on expanding their influence and getting their name out there. However, if these used some PR strategies presented Tom Kelleher, author of Public Relations Online; they might be able to take their growth to a whole new level. This could result in greater recognition, volunteer recruitment, more donations, and overall a more influential not-for-profit.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:
Purpose: It is hard to deny that Sunshine Horses is fighting for a noble cause. Furthermore, the organization runs entirely on donations and the hard work of the Sunshine volunteers. On this basis alone, Sunshine Horses sits on a solid foundation.

Atmosphere: Sunshine Horses provides a very welcoming atmosphere to horses admitted into the program, as well as volunteers and anyone else who decides to lend a helping hand. The volunteers involved with Sunshine Horses are very knowledgeable in horse-care and have intense passions for what they do. Since these volunteers are so horse-savvy, Sunshine Horses offers a safe environment for both the horses and the people working with them. This allows for a great learning atmosphere between possible adopters, volunteers, youth program members, etc... where cherished connections can be made.

Website: One of the more recent developments of the organization is their detailed website. The web designer for the organization, Terri DelFavero, has made strides in bringing the organization’s website up to date and providing an online center for information about the group and involvement opportunities within Sunshine horses. The site has become much more interactive and professional, offering a much better perspective of what Sunshine Horses is all about and offering information on how to help. According to Kang & Norton’s factors in Tom Kelleher’s book, Public Relations Online, one of the most important parts of a non-profit organizations’ presence online is having contact information, details on how to join, information on how to donate money, online forms for people to apply, and links to specific sponsors of the organization, which can all be clearly found on the website (page 113).

Facebook Page: This is another area where the organization has made strides within recent years. (We’ll just ignore the fact that they are technically violating Facebook policy by using a profile as opposed to a page as an organization). As of two years ago, the Sunshine Horses profile and page were non-existent. Since the organization’s presence on Facebook was initiated, the profile has seen steady growth, and has also provided its’ fans with consistent information, pictures, articles, etc... to keep things interesting and up to date.

Weaknesses:

Other Social Media: While Sunshine Horses deserves praise for their developments of their Facebook persona, their presence on other social media platforms are lacking. For example, Sunshine Horses has no profile on either Twitter or YouTube, which could present great opportunities to the organization. This might partly be due to the fact that the majority of the volunteers haven’t been raised in the age of social media, therefore they may not understand the potential such sites offer. “Public relations people use online media as tools in the interactive process of identifying, building, and maintaining relationships between organizations and publics” (p.25).

Commitment: Similar to any not-for-profit, stable commitment is always an issue. Volunteers come and go and the organization is often not a priority for many. Unfortunately, during times of lower involvement, more work falls on fewer volunteers, which can be very burdensome to these select few. One possible solution to this dilemma is member expansion via exposure through social media and other methods. While there are obvious complications when expanding any sort of organization or company,
the boost in membership would certainly help in those situations when there aren’t enough people cleaning stalls.

Name Recognition: Sunshine Horses has been making several efforts to getting its’ name out there and getting more involved within the community. However, the primary basis of this recognition resides within the “horse world” and those involved with it. Sunshine Horses could be making more efforts to appealing to those that may not normally consider getting involved with horse-care. Like any organization, it is important to get a diverse set of opinions and idea flow within the group. Through targeting a different niche of members, the organization could gain a different type of volunteer base; this volunteer base could contribute things such as: new donations, new ideas, new perspectives, and new audiences. Branching off to these different audiences could lead to growth within the organization.

Opportunities:

Twitter: Twitter is a great tool for networking on a massive scale and is quickly rising to the forefront in the world of social media. Many businesses and organizations are starting to catch on to this trend and are using the site to benefit their group and to promote their cause/product. Sunshine Horses currently does not have a Twitter page. Sunshine Horses could definitely benefit from an active presence on Twitter. Not only is Twitter a great way for an organization to post updates for current members/followers, it is a great way to gain new members and expand the group’s name recognition online. Not only is Twitter a great way for an organization to expand their influence and get information out, it is also a great way to get the attention of some big names. There have been many not-for-profit organizations that have really taken off with the nudge of a celebrity, giving the group their stamp of approval. Twitter provides a great medium for such organizations to contact celebrities that may embrace their cause and help them develop and expand as an organization. “Online communication seems to be everywhere you look in public relations” (pg.xiii).

YouTube: Sunshine Horses also does not have a YouTube account. YouTube could be considered one of the greatest areas of communal user generated content on the web. How could this be site be used to benefit Sunshine Horses? As any horse savvy person could tell you, you can often observe many things about a horse by simply seeing them run around a pasture for a couple of minutes. While several pictures are offered on the website of the different horses that are up for adoption within the program, there is only one video. They say a picture is worth a thousand words... how many could a video be worth? There are dozens of horses that are adopted through Sunshine Horses, but this is often a slow process. YouTube could provide a great way for potential adopters to really get an in depth look at what a horse has to offer. By simply creating “web profiles” for each horse up for adoption, potential adopters could start coming out of the wood-works. The establishment of a Sunshine Horses YouTube channel could only help.

Threats:

Similar to Sunshine Horses, there are several organizations that are dedicated to a similar cause of providing horses with good homes with loving owners. While “competition” seems like the wrong word to use when it comes to talking about not-for-profit organizations... these organizations are competing
in a way. Although they have a similar goal, they are still competing over several things, such as: horses, sponsors, volunteers, donations, publicity, space, etc. This is an unfortunate circumstance, but it only means that Sunshine Horses must work that much harder to get their name out there to the public.

Expanding with Celebrities:

As mentioned, celebrities can play vital roles in the success of organizations. Our culture has a fixation on celebrity, and the public takes into high consideration of what celebrities have to say. If an organization can find the right celebrity to represent their cause, the group can expand and appeal to a completely new and broader audience.

Celebrities on the Local Level - Wayne Mahar

Wayne Mahar is a local celebrity in the Central New York area who is the chief meteorologist for CNY Central News Channel 3 whom is actively involved within the community and is a well-known public figure. Sunshine Horses has already made connections with Wayne Mahar through the Priscilla Mahar Animal Welfare Foundation, which was set up in honor of his Mother. Wayne Mahar can be a vital asset to Sunshine Horses by providing local exposure to the organization and to help encourage involvement from the community.

Celebrities on the National Level – Wendie Malick

Wendie Malick is a well-known actress who has appeared in several TV shows and films such as: Just Shoot Me!, Frasier, Hot in Cleveland, Dream On, Baywatch, Big Day, and is currently in production of a film entitled Wild Horse Annie. Wendie Malick is also a native New Yorker, with her hometown in Buffalo, NY. Wendie Malick is also about much more than the Hollywood scene. Wendie Malick is a consistent activist of the Humane Society (HSUS) and has taken a particular interest in horses, advocating on behalf of mistreated horses before Congress. Wendie Malick seems like the perfect celebrity for Sunshine Horses and could help the organization reach a national level.

Conclusion:

Needless to say, Sunshine Horses is already a notable organization that supports a heroic cause and has made tremendous strides towards their common goal. However, there are techniques mentioned by Kelleher in his book, Public Relations Online, that could significantly help the organization grow. I think a realistic goal for the organization for the near future is to expand even further out in New York State than they already are, perhaps even setting up different branches in separate parts of the state. If Sunshine Horses uses some of these Online PR tactics presented by Kelleher... they could evolve into a completely different organization.