Social Media Basics for Conservation Organizations

Organizations can enhance and expand their conservation impact by using social media to engage new and existing supporters.

Introduction

The content in this guide is applicable to a broad range of entities including land trusts, watershed associations, trail groups, parks departments, and environmental advisory councils. These are all referred to generically in the guide as "organizations."

This guide describes strategies, practices, and terminology that will likely remain relevant and accurate for some time; nevertheless, significant changes to the social media platforms discussed (a frequent occurrence, as the social media landscape shifts frequently) may render specific guidance outdated.

The Benefits of Using Social Media

Millions of people use social media on a regular basis to communicate with friends, access news, and follow topics of interest. While younger people tend to be more active on social media, older Americans use social media sites, especially Facebook,[1] in significant numbers as well. Because of this, a great many organizations use social media accounts to enhance their internet presence. For most, social media accounts have become just as important as more traditional digital tools like websites and email lists.

Usually, organizations have accounts on multiple social media platforms so they can reach the widest possible audience. This guide focuses on the most established of the

many platforms in use: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#). Additionally, the guide will explore in briefer overview some other popular platforms such as [YouTube](#), [Vimeo](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Snapchat](#), and [TikTok](#). Creating an account on any of the major platforms is free, though options exist on some of the platforms to access greater design and control through paid account access.

Organizations can use social media to showcase their work and shape their organization's public image. Unlike websites, social media accounts do not require people to visit them intentionally; social media posts can show up on the screens of people who have never heard of your organization. This feature makes social media an effective tool for reaching new audiences—especially younger people— who might be interested in conservation but have not sought out the organization's website or subscribed to their email list. From these new audiences can emerge donors, volunteers, event attendees, future staff members, and better-educated citizens. Social media accounts can also help people in an organization's existing network stay involved, informed, and inspired. Also, through strategic sharing of original website-based content (blog posts, events, and more) via social media and e-newsletters, organizations can drive greater traffic to their websites as well. Social media is a sophisticated way to connect to and build an informed and loyal audience.

Time Commitment

To maintain an effective social media presence, you should expect to devote time to social media. How much time ought to be reflective of the organization's size, budget, and staffing. Research finds that for an established organization with devoted communications staff, 15-20+ hours per week of devoted social media management is not uncommon. Research has shown that organizations that post more than 10 times per week see 4-5 times as much engagement per post as organizations that

only post 3-10 times per week.[1] To optimize their outreach, organizations engage with multiple social media platforms to address their different audiences. Establishing a foothold on those platforms takes time and careful curation.

Many organizations (especially newer or volunteer-led ones) find it difficult to make time for social media. This is understandable. However, considering social media's potential to help a growing organization meet its mission in dynamic ways, even a volunteer-led social media management strategy should consider investing a reasonable amount of time. Research has shown that organizations with little time to devote to social media will see 4-5 times as much engagement per post if they post at least 3 times per week, as opposed to 1 or fewer posts per week. An organization should consider carving out time in the day to maintain at least a YouTube, Facebook, or Instagram account for their organization since roughly 80% of Americans regularly use YouTube, 70% of Americans regularly use Facebook, and almost 50% of Americans regularly use Instagram. Thirty percent of Americans regularly use TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and Twitter.[2] If time allows, consider expanding to other platforms— choosing 2-3 platforms is a fairly common recommendation.

Some organizations understandably can't prioritize that much time. No matter the circumstances, it's key to try to find a manageable rate of posting and stick to that as best as one can. For example, even if an organization can only post once or twice a month, if they stick to that schedule with some consistency, they'll never have a long gap in postings and can maintain relevancy and consistency.

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[1] BoardAssist, "[How Much Time Should Your Nonprofit Invest on Social Media?](#)" This article references data from a HubSpot social media benchmarks report that specifically examined statistics for nonprofit and educational organizations.

[2] Pew Research Center, "[Social Media and News Fact Sheet](#)"

Key Terms

Below are definitions of key terms used in this guide that apply to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Platform-specific terms are defined in the sections covering each platform.

Engagement

Engagement consists of a user interacting with a post by reacting to it, commenting, sharing or retweeting it, or clicking on a link. Commenting is an available option on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Facebook and Twitter allow for posts to link to additional online content from other websites. On Twitter and Instagram, liking is the only available reaction option, whereas Facebook offers additional, more nuanced reactions: users can click emojis that correspond to happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, and laughter. Engagement can occur without likes, comments, or shares, too—if your post just appears in someone else's news feed, odds are good you can see that action reflected in your platform's engagement analytics.

Following and feeds

An account follows another account by clicking the follow button on that account's profile. When users log into the site, their screen (known as the news feed or feed) is full of posts from the accounts they follow. Essentially, followers are an organization's primary audience on social media. Following can be a way to show support for people, groups, and causes; indeed, some people mistakenly equate following with support. Because of this, some organizations choose to not follow any potentially controversial accounts. However, many organizations follow accounts that they do not support (or accounts hostile to their missions) in the interest of staying informed. Regardless, it remains generally true that a higher follower count is still seen as a sign of an organization's having a wide reach and greater sphere of influence in the eyes of the online and social media world.

Algorithm

Social media feeds are curated by algorithm, and each company's algorithm works a little differently. Posts including visual images, videos, and popular hashtags tend to succeed in reaching more of their followers' feeds. It is rare for any follower to see all of an organization's social media postings if they are following a significant number of organizations and people. Rather, the algorithm utilizes data based on that person's (or organization's) interests, likes, and more to deliver for them a feed more tailored to their interests.

The automated efficiency of the algorithm can be both a blessing and a curse. It can create a news feed experience that is more relevant for many social media users. However, for organizations trying to publicize fundraising initiatives and events, it can be frustrating if an important post is getting a low-level number of engagements and interactions because it has been buried by the algorithm and is only reaching a small percentage of followers' feeds. Many social media platforms deliberately employ algorithms that are designed to limit the reach of organizations as a means of encouraging them to buy advertisements.

Hashtag

A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by the # symbol that is used to identify and group posts on a specific topic. When people click on a hashtag or type it in the platform's search bar, they will see all the posts that include that hashtag. Anyone can create a hashtag simply by typing a word or phrase after the # symbol. Hashtags can help draw otherwise unaffiliated internet and social media users to an organization's posts.

In the early years of social media, hashtags were used frequently, often included directly in the copy of posts, and organizations often made up their own unique hashtags to try and create a unifying element for posts about a specific project or event. People still do this for weddings.

Over time, however, a kind of "hashtag fatigue" has set in, and nowadays the preferred usage for hashtags involves

trying to "hide" them or attach them to the end of posts. On Instagram, for example, some users will add a set of hashtags at the bottom of post captions after hitting return numerous times. This way the hashtags are tucked away from the main body of the caption but the post still benefits from the searchability of the hashtags, creating the potential for greater engagement. Occasional use of a hashtag in the copy of a post's main caption is fine, but it's best to keep their in-text usage minimal.

Do a little research to discover which hashtags connected with your work are the most frequently used or most popular. The more frequently a hashtag is used, the likelier it is that someone unaffiliated with the organization will find the post by searching for a specific hashtag, which will bring up all the most recent posts that utilized that hashtag on that platform. Make sure to check out potential hashtags before using them to make sure there are no surprise meanings that could hurt your organization's image. To view posts that include a particular hashtag, type the hashtag into the platform app's search bar.

In general, of the three main platforms discussed here, hashtag use is most common and acceptable on Twitter, followed by Instagram, then Facebook. It's acceptable to use them on all platforms, but they create greater engagement on Twitter and Instagram than Facebook.

Like

Each post has an icon that users click if they like the content. The amount of likes a post receives is one measure of its popularity. Additionally, the more often a post is liked, the more frequently it will appear in others' newsfeeds, due to the nature of most social media algorithms.

On Facebook, the like button is signified by a thumbs up icon button. A range of reactions beyond liking exist on Facebook and on LinkedIn. On Instagram and Twitter, liking is done by tapping a heart icon button.

On Facebook, users can also like the pages of organizations, businesses, and other entities they support. If a user likes a page, they also automatically follow that page (they can also opt to follow a page without liking it).

Mention

Mentioning means including the name of another account in a post, preceded by the @ symbol. This creates a clickable link to that account and notifies the account that it has been mentioned in a post. On Facebook, the @ symbol doesn't actually appear in the text; on Twitter and Instagram, it does.

Mentioning can vary from platform to platform. For example, companies or organizations with lengthier names can (and almost always do) use their full name on Facebook but create shorter or more limited names on both Twitter and Instagram. Accounts on Twitter and Instagram are branded and identified with their account name, and brevity is important. It's important to be aware of the correct way to tag an organization so that mistakes are not made. It is not at all unusual for the same company or organization to have variances among their social media platform names like this, due to numerous factors, chiefly timing—popular social media networks spring up at different times and often employ differing branding strategies than earlier platforms. As technology evolves, so does social media.

Post

A post, once published to a social media account, joins the larger feed and can now be seen by your followers. Facebook posts can be virtually any length and include text, photos, and videos. Twitter posts (known as tweets) can include the same things but are limited to 280 characters. Instagram posts feature a photo or video with a caption.

Post strategies vary from platform to platform. For example, it is easy to share links to other website-based content on both Facebook and Twitter. Those links will automatically appear as clickable hyperlinks with a banner image attached to promote visibility and ease of access for other users. It is nearly impossible to do so on Instagram, though links can be added to account bios and stories, which is less convenient and harder to access, generally. Instagram did this deliberately to make their platform more about the curated sharing of visual content (pictures

and videos), and while it was a very unique strategy at the time Instagram began, it proved to be a popular change, as Instagram quickly grew to become one of the most popular social media platforms.

Twitter's character limits are a famously unique aspect of that platform's user experience. While it promotes economic brevity in the descriptive aspects of a post (not in itself a bad thing) and makes a Twitter feed a more efficient and speedy experience for users to navigate, it can obviously be limiting, too—especially if you are trying to describe your organization's upcoming event or recent programming success.

Meta (Facebook and Instagram's holding company) and Twitter allow platform users to schedule posts. This is an especially useful feature for businesses and organizations as it allows them to spread posts out more strategically and to reach their audience during "peak scrolling hours," or high-traffic social media windows of time. (See "Analytics" for more.)

General Guidelines

Some general guidelines for effective social media usage hold true across the various platforms.

Drive Traffic to Your Websites with Social Media

In general, it has become standard best practice for organizations to generate as much social media content as they can via their own webpages. Examples:

- *Sharing an event on Facebook?* Share the event link that drives traffic directly to your own website's events pages in addition to describing the event briefly in a way that will convince readers to click the link to learn more.

- *Sharing exciting news about a finished project via Twitter?* Create a blog post story on your own website about the event. This post can be where the press release is housed online, along with relevant photos.

Share the blog post link with a short description on Twitter, and make sure one of the connected photos appears along with the link to the post.

Nowadays, a great deal of an organization's web traffic is generated from specific links shared via social media or emailed newsletters.

Create an Attractive and Informative Account

In the "about" section of social media accounts, describe the organization's mission and work in a few well-crafted sentences, not paragraphs. A company website is a better place for a more extensive description. For the profile picture, using the organization's logo is always a dependable choice, as it reinforces branding and recognizability of the company. Many businesses and organizations design holiday versions of their logo or variations to support other causes from time to time. Facebook and Twitter also have space for a horizontal banner photo. Change the photo periodically to keep your account looking fresh. A healthy recommendation is to update the cover photo every few months, perhaps seasonally. Some organizations do this more frequently and update their cover photos to coincide with specific upcoming events as an added means of drumming up publicity. Changing profile and cover photos on Facebook is one of the easiest ways to circumvent the algorithm, as those photo changes tend to be seen by many more followers than other posts.

Also, be sure to complete the fields that list your location, type of organization, website, phone number, and other information.

Develop a Distinct Voice

When executed properly and with care, a social media strategy can remind supporters of your organization of the more relatable aspects of your work's mission. Social media gives organizations the opportunity to cultivate a distinct online personality that reflects the organization's values and culture. Different organizations have different styles, which can shine through in a variety of ways. Tone

and style are key aspects of developing a social media presence, and organizations generally have to be more careful than specific individuals in this area so as not to potentially alienate any prospective clients, partners, or supporters.

That said, the social media sphere is a much less formal rhetorical space than a website, company newsletter, or press release ought to be. Most organizations do tend to create a voice and style on social media that falls somewhere in between "formal" and "fun." It's certainly worth noting, too, that tone and style can and ought to shift a bit from post to post. For example, a thoughtful "call for donations" post ought to read differently than a celebratory "volunteer of the year" post.

Developing a consistent voice is easiest if one person manages an organization's social media accounts. If multiple people post on the accounts, maintaining a consistent voice requires good communication and a well-defined set of guidelines for the style and content of posts. Many organizations include these guidelines in their policies and procedures manuals.

Use More Images and Fewer Words

Due to the dynamic, increasingly visual nature of social media, posts with photos or videos will perform better than text-only posts. Longer blocks of text, especially when not accompanied by a photo or video, tend to perform poorly with most social media algorithms. Avoid using low-resolution images, and check posts before and after posting to ensure that the images included have posted in the way you expected them to. It's always better to edit (or delete and rework) a flawed post than to leave it up.

If you have a lot of information to share (for example, announcing a new easement acquisition), don't create a five-paragraph Facebook post. Instead, publish the full story on your website, then post the hyperlink on Facebook with a photo and brief description.

Curation of Content

Curation is referenced often in the management of social media for both personal and professional purposes. Curation implies being selective and careful, determining what's most worthy and accurate to affiliate with one's personal or professional brand. Like an art curator must carefully select and decide upon work for display in their museum or gallery, social media management deserves thought and careful consideration—a curatorial mindset.

By posting a variety of carefully curated content, an organization keeps their social media accounts fresh and interesting for different segments of their audience. While it is important to post about the achievements of an organization, including project updates and event announcements, it's additionally helpful to also occasionally post about other things like mission-connected news or the successes of partner organizations. Most organizations active on social media curate a mix of original content and content produced by others.

While an acknowledged best practice in social media management is to use as much content as possible in social media to direct viewers back to the organization's own website, an important part of selective social media curation involves considering when and how to post materials sourced to others. Expert social media curation involves strategically sharing your own website materials and knowing when not to. One example of when organizations should always post others' materials is when the story or post originates with another entity, like a newspaper, news station, or journalistic website. On the other hand, if an organization receives a press release about an event, that is a clear invitation to create their own post on the story.

Nonprofits are expected—often legally obligated—to be as nonpolitical as possible. However, many nonprofit missions wade into inherently political space, so it's critical for nonprofit organizations to manage these types of scenarios carefully. Consider: "Can this post affect my organization's image or reputation negatively? And, if so, is it worth the risk or not?" It is okay for nonprofits to take

principled stances about mission-connected causes, it's just always key to know your audience and weigh the risks vs. rewards. "Will our board support this? Do our patrons and supporters and funders support this kind of approach?" These are important considerations for any nonprofit communications strategy, including social media.

The conservation community in Pennsylvania has historically been a bipartisan space with representation from all sides of the political aisle, so for conservation organizations in Pennsylvania, maintaining a politically neutral (or at least inclusively bipartisan) tone remains important.

In general, social media postings can include three basic types of content in a post: hyperlink, photo, and video. More specifically, Facebook and Twitter allow for all three, while Instagram allows for photos and video, but does not hyperlink to other web addresses. Links can be combined with photos or videos, and free link-shortening websites like [TinyURL](#) make it easy to include a condensed link in the text of a post. A condensed link can save precious keystrokes in the character-limited space of a Twitter post. On Facebook, you can usually remove the link from the post caption once the link has attached itself to the draft post. Both methods (condensed links for Twitter, hidden links on Facebook) certainly look cleaner and more inviting for viewers, but a full link in a post caption is generally not going to deter followers from interacting with the material a vast majority of the time.

Interaction with Audience

No matter the platform, a primary component of social media is interaction with other people. This interaction happens in a variety of ways: users can like posts, add comments, send messages, vote on polls, and more. These features allow organizations to answer questions, gather feedback, and engage directly with supporters in real-time, which is difficult on a traditional website. By responding to messages and comments in a timely manner and inviting audience participation (e.g., through polls or caption contests), organizations can build personal connections

and develop their reputation as a reliable, helpful source of information.

Responding to comments and interacting with an audience of followers is something organizations must do with great care and professional courtesy. Imagine every social media interaction as a customer service experience taking place in a public space (online, where anyone can see the interaction) and it's easy to see why care and caution are just as important as the need to engage one's audience. A sense of balance is critical to successfully navigating these interactions. Liking someone's supportive comment on a Facebook post, liking someone's retweet of a Tweet of your organization—these simple gestures send a supportive message. It takes a second or two to do it, it's generally non-controversial, and it adds positive layers to the discourse. Responding with a simple "Thank you for your support!" in similar situations adds similar safe value.

It's key to be aware of the potential for negative interactions on social media, too. Some people live to "troll" in their online experiences. As the organization's social media audience grows, it's inevitable that some folks will follow and engage with posts who give off a negative or critical impression with much of what they post. A good rule of thumb here is to ignore this type of thing to the full extent that is possible. However, if it seems to become a distraction or a problem, problematic comments can always be deleted, if it seems truly necessary. Deleting negative comments, though, can often cause the situation to escalate. These kinds of scenarios are why the generally accepted best practice, even with negative comments, is to let them alone. It is worth noting, too, that there is a difference between a "trolling" comment designed to annoy and a sincere complaint offered in the hopes that a customer or supporter's issue can be resolved—the former should be ignored as much as possible, the latter should absolutely be addressed in the most prompt and polite ways possible. It is worth being aware of these kinds of negative possibilities, but also remains true that the conservation social media world is, well over 99% of the time,

a very friendly and supportive online social media community space. This reflects how the culture of this community operates in real life, too—the majority of conservation folks feel a sense of connectedness and support and a general camaraderie, and the social media platforms of those organizations tends to reflect that positive culture the vast majority of the time.

Engage with Other Organizations

Following and mentioning (or tagging) other accounts creates higher engagement and increases the likelihood of other organizations returning the favor. Just like individuals, organizations can follow the accounts of others and like, comment, and message. In addition to fostering connections with other organizations, this is a good way to keep track of conservation news and events. Bear in mind that the accounts your organization follows will be visible to the public. Mentioning or tagging other people and organizations makes for more informative posts: by clicking on the name of the tagged organization or person, readers are linked directly to that account. Often, mentioning an organization makes them likelier to return the favor. Through this exchange, organizations are exposed to new audiences of potential followers, plus positive connections are made between the two organizations.

Analytics

All platforms have a range of built-in features that allow organizations to analyze all kinds of data: likes, followers, link clicks, audience demographics, and more. Studying these analytics can help you understand which types of posts perform the best and determine the best times to post. Use a spreadsheet to track and compare key metrics such as followers, engagement rate, and impressions/reach over time.

See [Facebook Insights](#), [Twitter Analytics](#), and [Instagram Insights](#) for more information.

Pay to Advertise?

Any account or page can pay to advertise a particular post. Ads can be targeted to reach a customized audience based on interests, demographics, and more. For example, a post promoting a trails conference could target hikers, cyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts. By allowing social media users to "pay to play," social media companies generate revenue that keeps them in business, and ad buys have the added advantage of maximizing the algorithm to the ad buyers' advantage. Ads typically generate significantly increased views and engagements than a post would get organically.

Another option is to create an ad for the organization itself in order to gain new account followers. Ads can do this in targeted ways; for example, an organization might target their ad to reach anyone within their greater geographic area who has mission-connected interests based on the pages or accounts they already like or follow. Users set a total budget and length of time for the ad to run, and the website automatically allocates the daily spend accordingly.

Organizations successfully use paid ads in a variety of ways. Some of the most common include:

- *Fundraising* (e.g., a post asking people to contribute money towards an upcoming project or program)
- *Event promotion* (e.g., a post inviting people to an upcoming event)
- *Grassroots advocacy* (e.g., a post encouraging people to contact their legislators about a specific mission-connected issue)
- *Audience-building* (e.g., an ad about an organization and its mission)

For organizations with tight budgets, spending even $10 or $20 to advertise a post about an event or fundraising campaign can drastically increase the number of people who see the post. Keep in mind, however, that these increased views may not translate into action; the quality of the post and the audience it reaches are major factors. If possible, organizations should experiment with advertising to find out if it is effective for them.

Find advertising information specific to each social media platform at their respective pages at [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#). information.

Manage with Care

Keep track of social media account information and passwords with the same care as you would all other business-related account information. Two-factor authentication is now available for some social media accounts if a higher degree of account security is desirable for your organization.

Facebook

Overview

Facebook is the most popular informative social media site and offers the largest variety of features and functions. Despite these advantages, it also has unique challenges of its own.

It is best to curate cautiously on Facebook: because of its popularity—and ease of commenting—it can quickly become a social media space where arguments over seemingly minor matters can escalate. It can be hard to predict this kind of incident, but it's good to be mindful of checking notifications and following conversations that occur on social media so that potential can be managed or avoided whenever possible. The audience for Facebook has consistently skewed older over the last decade, so Facebook has become a good place to reach a middle-aged and older target audience.

In some cases, an unofficial, unmanaged Facebook page may have been automatically created for your organization. You can find guidance for claiming an unmanaged page online.

Learn more about creating and managing a page at the Facebook Help Center.

Key Terms

Comment

Below each post is a comment section where users can add their feedback. Organizations can reply to comments on their own posts and comment on the posts of others.

Keeping comments and replies courteous, friendly, and professional is a must for any organization interacting with individuals on Facebook.

News Feed

The news feed is the screen where posts appear. Users scroll through the news feed to view the posts of the accounts they follow. Facebook uses a proprietary algorithm to determine which posts appear in a user's news feed and how long they stay there; posts with more engagements generally appear in more users' news feeds. The content of users' news feeds is also shaped by their engagement behavior—if someone frequently engages with a page's posts, they are more likely to see future posts from that organization.

Share

Reposting content published by another account. Organizations can share posts from other pages; people can share posts by pages or other people. Shares are the means by which posts spread, sometimes like wildfire (when a post's popularity explodes, it has gone viral).

Page

Organizations have Facebook *pages*. Individuals, on the other hand, have *profiles*. When creating an account for your land trust, make sure to create a page, not a profile.

Creating an Effective Post

Though it is fast and easy to just share another page's post, original posts get higher engagement. In general, it is suggested that 50-80% of social media postings represent original, value-added content; 10-30% shared content; and 10%-30% promotional content. Organizations may have specific reasons why they need to share more of one kind of content than another.

Mentions

If the post includes the name of another organization, business, or entity with its own Facebook page, use the @ symbol to mention that page. Maintain that curatorial

sensibility, though: if tagging the organization in that post could be construed as a negative somehow for either organization, it may be better not to tag—or not to share that post—at all.

Links

When posting a hyperlink to another resource, explain in the post text the resource and encourage followers to click the link. As explained above, brevity is generally better. Here are some ideas:

- *Summarize the key takeaway. Example:* We just acquired an easement on this beautiful 100-acre farm. Learn more here: [link to press release]

- *Describe how the content relates to your work. Example:* @County's newly released comprehensive plan focuses on protecting open space from development. We're here to help. [link to news story]

- *Pose a question. Example:* Recently @LocalOrganization profiled #ExamplePreserve. Which of our preserves is your favorite? [link to web article]

- *Quote a line or two from the piece. Example:* "Studies show that children who play outdoors get better grades in school." #OptOutside [link to study]

When posting a link, an image from the linked website or article should display automatically. If this does not happen, or if the auto-generated image is not ideal, manually upload a photo to go along with the link.

Photos

When posting a photo with no link, the text is less important. Followers will see the image no matter what, and there's no incentive to entice them to click on anything. A simple caption will work—let the photo tell the rest of the story.

Example: We had a great time restoring the streambank with volunteers from @LocalClub! [group photo along streambank]

Videos

To post a video, you can either upload the video file directly from your computer or post a link to a video from sites like Youtube or Vimeo. The Facebook algorithm often buries YouTube links and they frequently end up with few views and low engagement. Because of this algorithmic issue, it's recommended to upload video files directly to Facebook when possible. Uploaded videos will automatically play when someone scrolls over them in the news feed, generating more views. Linked videos will appear with an image that viewers must click on to play the video. To entice people to click, you may need to spend a bit more time crafting a clever caption than you would for a photo. In the example below, clickbait strategies withhold information deliberately to entice the viewer to click and find out more.

Example: Jim has been farming for 50 years on land that has been in his family since 1875. Learn why he decided to donate a conservation easement. [video]

Events

The Create an Event feature allows you to create a Facebook page for an upcoming event, complete with a description, time and date information, a map, and photos. You can include other Facebook pages as co-hosts, which makes it easy to collaborate with partner organizations. Facebook users can RSVP to the event and share it like they would a regular post. Most organizations choose to also create a page for the event on their website so that they can share the link via email with non-Facebook users.

Conversely, Facebook event creation is time consuming, so it may be best to try to determine quickly if the time invested is worth the convenience. An alternate approach that can be more efficient involves creating event pages on the organizational website, then sharing those pages directly to social media.

Polls

The Create a Poll feature allows an organization to poll their audience on a particular topic. This can be a helpful tool to receive feedback and engage an audience. Keep in

mind that the responses tell only how these particular Facebook users view a matter; results can't be meaningfully applied to a much broader group.

When to Post?

Utilizing a curatorial sense of timing is a good way to determine when to post: is high engagement a priority on this post? Then post it at optimal engagement times according to your analytics. Account managers can use the Insights tool, which shows when their page's followers are online throughout each day, to optimize the posting schedule. Schedule posts ahead of time by clicking "schedule" instead of "publish," then choosing a date and time. Scheduling ahead is more easily managed via the Meta interface, so if an organization finds scheduling posts to be advantageous for both Facebook and Instagram, it's worth checking to see if paying extra for business account access via Meta is a cost-effective investment.

Gaining Followers

If an organization creates effective posts and posts regularly, their page should gain followers over time. Facebook also has a feature that allows organizations to invite people to like their page. Beneath a post, click where it says "X number of people liked this." A list of everyone who liked the post should appear, and next to their names an indication of whether they already like the page. If they don't, options to send an invitation to like the page are readily available. Using this method, organizations can expand their audience to include people who have demonstrated an interest in their content.

Twitter

Overview

Twitter is an effective complement to Facebook and can help an organization reach a wider, slightly younger audience. It is also a good platform for following the press and elected officials. Twitter is a much more journalistic space than Facebook, though it is also heavily editorialized and

can be just as combative a space as Facebook at times, especially if a post goes viral and rapidly reaches a wide audience. On Twitter, most conservation organizations can share the same content they share on Facebook, often with little to no modifications. Since Tweets are limited to 280 characters, eye-catching brevity is paramount. Two methods work to maximize efficiency and effectiveness here:

- A social media manager can write a post caption for Twitter first, then copy-paste the brief Twitter copy for other platforms to save time; or
- If more explanation seems needed elsewhere, the caption copy can be drafted for Facebook then edited to fit Twitter's limitations.

Learn more about creating and managing an account at the Twitter Help Center.

Key Terms

Impressions

The number of times a tweet appears in the timeline of a user.

Reply

Analogous to the comment function on Facebook. Twitter users can reply to a post by typing in the reply section beneath it.

Retweet

Reposting content published by another account. Since the Twitter algorithm rewards higher posting intensity moreso than Facebook, it's desirable to post (and retweet) more frequently on Twitter.

Timeline

The Twitter equivalent to Facebook's news feed. When one publishes a tweet, it appears in the timelines of some followers. Like Facebook, Twitter uses an algorithm that determines which tweets appear in a user's timeline. The Twitter algorithm, like Facebook's and Instagram's, can

be leveraged advantageously by paying to boost a post with an ad purchase.

Creating an Effective Tweet

Twitter and Facebook have some stark contrasts. Whereas Facebook has no real limits on post lengths, Twitter's character limits force users to craft extremely economical, sometimes heavily abbreviated, postings. While the Facebook crowd is often very conversational in the comments, Twitter commentary is somewhat rare unless a tweet goes viral, in which case reply comments do occur at an intense rate. Despite these differences, many of the same guidelines for effective Facebook posts also apply to Twitter. To create a tweet with the same content (link, photo, video, etc.) as a Facebook post, you can simply copy and paste the text of the post, insert the same link, or upload the same photo. When copying and pasting, make sure to use the @ symbol to mention any accounts mentioned in the post.

Often, Twitter's character limit may force you to modify the text of longer Facebook posts. Condense text by sharpening language and using abbreviations. The character limit causes all sorts of otherwise formal journalists, academics, and policy people to abbreviate and shorten relentlessly.

Don't Auto-Link Twitter to Facebook

Avoid using the feature that automatically links the organization's Facebook page to its Twitter account. Though this may be convenient, it is largely ineffective because the resultant tweets will consist only of hyperlinks to Facebook, with no other texts or images. These tweets won't catch anyone's attention and will make it obvious that the organization is not investing time in its Twitter account.

When to Tweet?

Aim for at least 1-3 original tweets per day—the nature of Twitter as a place for up-to-the-minute news means that frequent posting is the norm. Studies show that tweets between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., especially on weekdays (when Twitter users tend to be more active), are generally effective guidelines. Using the Analytics tool to optimize timing based on audience engagement data and analytics is a terrific way to employ a reliably data-driven approach. Twitter's regular interface makes scheduling easy: clicking the calendar and clock icon along the bottom of a Tweet window opens up the schedule list, where users can always check their scheduled Tweets in an easy-to-read list before deciding when to schedule a new Tweet.

Instagram

Overview

Instagram is a platform where you can post photos and videos; its user base skews younger than that of Facebook and Twitter.

Because of the highly visual nature of their work, conservation organizations are in a great position to use Instagram successfully. Photos of beautiful landscapes, wildlife, and people enjoying the outdoors can highlight the importance of conservation in a way that words cannot. If an organization already publishes photos on Facebook or Twitter, it makes sense to share them on Instagram as well. Posting on Instagram is a simple and quick way to expand audience and potentially connect the cause of conservation to a younger demographic. Instagram has worked hard to retain its younger user base by adapting many newer video-driven and story-sharing options (such as vertical video reels, the story feed, and live streaming options) that mimic other social media platforms popular with younger users like Snapchat and TikTok.

Learn more about creating and managing an account at the Instagram Help Center.

Instagram works smoothly as a mobile-based platform: an organization can create an account and view photos on a computer, but posting photos, reels, or stories through the free Instagram app on a smartphone or tablet can be a smoother process than computer-based approaches. The Meta interface allows for the planning of Instagram posts

via computer (an excellent way to schedule posts ahead of time), but the phone app version of Instagram remains a good tool for use of this platform, especially for efficiently engaging with followers.

Instagram can be useful for more than just sharing photos. Many organizations now invest more time designing original graphics or creating short videos specifically to brand and advertise events or projects via Instagram.

Creating an Effective Post

Choosing the Right Photo or Video

As on Facebook and Twitter, organizations can share photos and videos that tell the story of their mission and work. Along with typical shots of preserved lands, events, and volunteers at work, organizations post photos and videos that give a behind-the-scenes look into the organization (for example, from a training conference or staff holiday party). There are many possibilities, and curating photos or videos depends on what kind of visual brand the organization wants to build and maintain. In addition to landscapes and wildlife, showing people enjoying the outdoors can highlight the impact of conservation on people, and helps viewers imagine themselves in the outdoors.

Captions and Tags

Use the caption area to add context to the post, describe what's happening, or ask followers to take some kind of action. The caption area is where to use hashtags and mention other accounts, if relevant to the post. Organizations can also tag other accounts by clicking on the photo or video and typing their name; they will be notified of the tag and can then readily share or re-share the post.

Tagging can also be done in stories and reels. Story tags make it easy for the group you're tagging to re-share to their own story. This can quickly increase the range, reach, and engagement of a story post, so tagging relevant connections in stories is a smart strategy for audience growth and building good relationships.

Story

Photos or videos posted to an account's story disappear after 24 hours. Publishing a photo or video as a story post, rather than a normal post, can be useful for documenting an event in real-time with photos and videos that an organization wouldn't want cluttering their profile in the future. However, for organizations posting on Instagram a few times a week or less, this is not as much of a concern. Many individual users and organizations utilize their story feed for sharing the posts of other organizations and partners. Story sharing another group's post is a quick way to make a positive connection and boost signal on worthwhile content that aligns with your own organization's efforts.

Live

Videos can be shared in posts, reels, or stories. Additionally, Instagram allows users to go "live" and livestream directly to their story. An advantage to this approach is that live broadcasts send notifications to most of that account's followers' notifications. A live broadcast is an easy way to notify your audience that your organization is doing something important right now and they should tune in to check it out. Even after the "live" feature ends, it is not difficult to keep the video accessible to followers for a time or to convert it into a post.

Reels

Reels allow Instagram users to share a short vertical video experience, a phone friendly experience similar to TikTok. Video content like reels gets a greater boost in the Instagram algorithm than traditional photo posts.

When to Post?

There is no hard and fast rule for ideal posting frequency on Instagram—some popular and effective land trust accounts post multiple times per day, while others post once or twice a week. The biggest determining factor is the amount of quality photos and videos available.

For most organizations, posting 1-5 times per week is a manageable and effective strategy. When you post a photo or video on Instagram, it usually makes sense to publish it on your other social media sites.

The Instagram Algorithm and Ads

With each new option Instagram has implemented, it has adjusted its algorithm to favor that format above others. Livestreams, reels, and other video content get greater views in follower feeds than still pictures. Though it began as a photo-focused platform, Instagram now prioritizes videos. Despite this, engaging photo posts can still garner effective engagement.

Like other platforms, Instagram allows individuals and organizations to boost their visibility on certain posts through the purchase of ads.

Other Platforms

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram give organizations a chance to reach a broad, diverse audience. Depending on their needs and resources, certain organizations may also want to consider other platforms.

Video Hosting Sites: YouTube and Vimeo

You can upload and view videos at YouTube, the world's leading video-sharing site. It is a popular choice for organizations that create videos. Vimeo is a less-trafficked and less ad-ridden video platform that streams uploaded videos just as effectively as YouTube. While YouTube videos have a much greater chance of racking up views, Vimeo as a video hosting platform is generally seen as a more professional online space, where YouTube, in no small part due to its popularity, is a crowded and more ungoverned online space. Organizations should determine which of those two options—YouTube's reach or Vimeo's professionalism—is more important before committing to one or the other. Maintaining two separate video hosting sites for a conservation organization is not especially efficient, nor is it necessary—one should be just fine.

LinkedIn

People use LinkedIn to network and find jobs, internships, and volunteer opportunities. Organizations can create a Company page; staff, board members, and volunteers with LinkedIn accounts can then link to the organization in the section where they list their professional and volunteer roles. Organizations can also post jobs, internships, and volunteer opportunities. LinkedIn is a more reliable place to post job listings than most other popular job sites.

Traditional social media posts can also be shared via LinkedIn, but you must curate carefully as it is a more formal and professional platform than the others.

Snapchat and TikTok

Snapchat and TikTok are more recent popular social media platforms that have a huge base of young users. Both are vertical video and story-driven platforms that work intuitively with smartphones.

TikTok has become a massive international success which, while popular with young Americans, is even more popular in many other countries all over the world.

Video-driven platforms are widely recognized as the future of social media, as video content tends to have a higher rate of engagement than photo or text-based posts. For example, Instagram has remained popular with younger users by adopting Snapchat's stories and TikTok's reel-style formats.

The story of social media since its early days in the 2000s has indicated that today's platform for the younger crowd is tomorrow's platform for everyone, so organizations may want to consider TikTok or Snapchat as social media options for the future if not already engaged with those platforms.

Additional Resources

Posting Schedule

For more information about the best days and times to post on each platform, see CoSchedule's "Best Times to

Post on Social Media" and "How Often to Post on Social Media," which collect and analyze the available data from different studies.

Content

For ideas about different types of content a nonprofit organization can post, see npENGAGE's "50 Social Media Content Ideas."

Volunteer Recruitment

For tips on using social media to recruit volunteers, see Constant Contact's "Engage, Inform, Recruit: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media to Recruit Volunteers."

Fundraising

For tips on using social media to fundraise, see:

- Classy's "How to Turn Social Media Followers into Donors,"

- Byte Technology's "Time Well Spent: How Much Effort a Non-Profit Should Devote to Social Media Fundraising," and

- "9 Tips to Maximize Your Fundraising with Social Media" on Medium.

For information about crowdfunding, an online fundraising tool often used in conjunction with social media, see the guide *Crowdfunding for Land Trusts*.

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