Instagram

International Association of Chiefs of Police

Social media allows law enforcement agencies to better communicate their news with the public. While departments can and should still work with conventional media, they no longer need to rely on those media outlets to share news stories. Social media platforms provide an excellent opportunity to build trust with the community. However, if departments are not prepared to consistently manage and message on social media, it can sometimes end up doing more harm than good. Here are some best practices and important questions to consider, to help your agency make the most of this powerful communications tool.

BE THERE

THE BASICS

Instagram is a photo- and video-centric platform. The focus has evolved, and it is no longer just about filtering photos. This platform provides a great opportunity for law enforcement to share a window into the profession, help the community get to know officers, and provide helpful tips.

WHAT MAKES INSTAGRAM DIFFERENT?

More Photos, Less Text

There is unlimited text available on Instagram posts, but that is not a license to write a novel in your post. Remember, most people are using the app on their phones. Sharing photos with very little text creates a unique form of communication that appeals to younger demographics.

Stories

Instagram's "Stories" feature lets users share content which is featured for 24 hours and can be saved for later. Stories are a prime opportunity to showcase a more informal look at the profession, especially community events. Stories have fun features, such as polls, stickers, fonts, and filters which can make your story come to life.

BE READY

DEVELOPING AN INSTAGRAM STRATEGY

While it might seem like you are just sharing photos as the police department goes about its day, there is so much more that can be done. Instagram is a great place to get creative. Consider the following content ideas and brainstorm with your staff for other ideas that fit your agency and community's culture and interests.

- Do a recurring "Meet the Officer" feature taking advantage of the gallery feature and unlimited text to help bring the community closer.

- Use "Stories" to follow someone for a day in the life.

- Use "Discovery" to explore what's happening around you and find stories related to your interests.

- Try a "Takeover Tuesday" and let someone in the police department who does not normally run the Instagram account run it for the day, such as a training academy commander. Be sure the person has proper training and a Public Information Officer/social media specialist supervision.

- Share pictures of your officers interacting with the people they serve every day.

PLATFORM PARTICULARS

- **One billion** users log in every month.[i]

- **38%** of users check Instagram multiple times a day.[ii]

- **71%** of users are under the age of 35.[iii]

- **35%** of online adults use Instagram.[iv]

- Users "like" **4.2 billion** posts per day.[v]

- **500 million** people use "Stories" every day.[vi]

- Time spent watching videos increased **80%** from 2016 to 2017.[vii]

BEWARE

THE PITFALLS

There have been few negative issues for organizations on Instagram compared to other social media platforms. Instagram is a mobile-friendly app with limited desktop capabilities to navigate and post on the app, so ensure that department communication staff are aware that updating and/or posting must be done via a mobile device. As with all social media platforms, the Instagram account should be monitored so that anything such as untrue comments or off-topic matters can be addressed as quickly as possible.

Tips, Tricks, and Strategies to Consider

- Have a defined strategy for Instagram, as it is ideal for eye-grabbing photos. Decide which types of photos or videos you will post, how often, and how you will interact with the community both on your feed, in Discovery, or on Stories.

- Engagement is your goal. Meaningful interaction matters, as it builds loyalty and trust. Instagram Stories are an informal method of engagement.

- Don't post the same message on multiple platforms. If you want to share the same content on Instagram, tailor the copy to fit your strategy, Instagram's photo feed or stories style, and the unlimited character usage.

- Have a Social Media Manager as well as a designated backup, who are both knowledgeable of Instagram's feed and Stories. If something needs to be posted immediately, all members of the department should know who is in charge.

- Know your jurisdiction's policies and public information laws that will affect your Instagram strategy, particularly as it applies to Stories and photos.

For more information about social media in your agency visit the Technology and Social Media page on the IACP website. If you are an IACP member access the Social Media Considerations documents for practices of implementation.

ENDNOTES

i "Our Story." Instagram. August 09, 2018. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://instagram-press.com/our-story/.

ii Smith, Aaron, and Monica Anderson. "Social Media Use 2018: Demographics and Statistics." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. September 19, 2018. Accessed March 19, 2019. http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/.

iii "Global Instagram User Age & Gender Distribution 2019 | Statistic." Statista. January 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://www.statista.com/statistics/248769/age-distribution-of-worldwide-instagram-users/.

iv Clarke, Todd. "22 Instagram Statistics That Matter to Marketers in 2019." Hootsuite Social Media Management. March 5, 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/.

v Abutaleb, Yasmeen. "Instagram Just Hit the 500 Million User Mark." Money. June 21, 2016. Accessed March 19, 2019. http://money.com/money/4376329/instagram-users/.

vi "Instagram Stories Daily Active Users 2019 | Statistic." Statista. January 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://www.statista.com/statistics/730315/instagram-stories-dau/.

vii "2M Monthly Advertisers on Instagram." Instagram for Business. September 25, 2017. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://business.instagram.com/blog/welcoming-two-million-advertisers/.