

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Twitter

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

Twitter has changed the way news is reported and consumed. It is also changing the way the news media gathers information and finds stories. Twitter allows departments to get important information to the community quickly and unfiltered by media perspective.

This critical communication provides an opportunity for law enforcement to improve relationships with the community and the media by connecting directly and quickly with them about time sensitive notifications. Twitter is an avenue to share good news stories with the public and encourage media to bring further attention to them.

WHAT MAKES TWITTER DIFFERENT?

Character Limit

Twitter, even after doubling its character count to 280 characters, is about brevity. You have a limited amount of space and time for people to see your tweet before it gets lost in their feed. But there are some savvy ways to give your tweet a shot at standing out. Trending topics, hashtags, recurring series, and using GIFs or video have all proven to boost engagement.

BE READY

DEVELOPING A TWITTER STRATEGY

A common and successful strategy is to use Twitter primarily as your department's news feed. You do not need to wait for a formal press conference or press release to get your message to the community. With Twitter, you can share information related to department news or investigations with the community and the media instantly.

Some departments are comfortable using humor and personality on Twitter, and this can garner significant engagement. Using this approach can also change people's perceptions about law enforcement. This approach also allows a department to utilize Twitter as a recruitment tool.

Twitter can also help build relationships with the community and law enforcement agencies. Retweet, like, and comment on tweets from your community, other police departments, and other public safety sources to share expertise, reach audiences with different message styles, and encourage dialogue.



PLATFORM PARTICULARS

- **500 million** tweets are sent each day.ⁱ
- **71%** of Twitter users are reading news.ⁱⁱ
- People are **31%** more likely to remember what they see on Twitter compared to general online browsing.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The half-life of a tweet is **24 minutes**. It then starts a slow decline in traction and interaction.^{iv}
- Tweet engagement peaks at **3pm on weekdays**.^v
- Tweets with a GIF get **55%** more engagement.^{vi}

BEWARE

THE PITFALLS

Twitter is perhaps home to the most negative responses and comments on social media. Someone must be tasked with nearly constant monitoring of Twitter, and ideally, all your social media platforms.

Bad news travels fast. You need to be prepared for a bad story to have a hashtag attached and start trending immediately. The best thing you can do if this happens is to control the narrative and be the one telling your story, not reacting to it. Have a plan in place for how your team will react if your department goes viral for the wrong reasons. It's better to have the plan and never need it than to need the plan and not have it.

Tips, Tricks, and Strategies to Consider

- Have a defined strategy for Twitter. It is the best platform for quick engagement via retweet or likes. Decide what types of content you will post, how often, and how you will interact with the community.
- Engagement is your goal. Meaningful interaction matters, as it builds loyalty and trust. Twitter is the ideal platform for engagement.
- Ensure your Twitter banner and icon photo are consistent with your other social media accounts.
- Don't post the same message on multiple platforms. If you want to share the same content, tailor the copy to fit your strategy, Twitter's style, and the 280-character limit.
- Have a Social Media Manager as well as a designated backup who both understand the nuances of Twitter. 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 Twitter strategy, particularly as it applies to retweeting or liking other's content.
- Know your community and what is engaging. If humor is not received well then alter your strategy.

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 Stricker, Gabriel. "The 2014 #YearOnTwitter." Twitter. December 10, 2014. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2014/the-2014-yearontwitter.html.

ii Matsa, Katerina Eva, and Elisa Shearer. "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2018." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. September 21, 2018. Accessed March 19, 2019. <http://www.journalism.org/2018/09/10/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2018/>.

iii Park, Mike. "Expanding In-Stream Video Ads to More Advertisers Globally." Twitter. June 12, 2018. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://blog.twitter.com/marketing/en_us/topics/product-news/2018/expanding-in-stream-video-ads-to-more-advertisers-globally.html.

iv Rey, Benjamin. "Your Tweet Half-life Is 1 Billion times Shorter than Carbon-14's." Wiselytics. March 5, 2014. Accessed March 19, 2019. <http://www.wiselytics.com/blog/tweet-isbillion-time-shorter-than-carbon14/>.

v Hootsuite Media Inc. "Hootsuite Research | Social Marketing Insights & Statistics by Sector." Hootsuite. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://hootsuite.com/research?businessSize=all&industry=all>.

vi Twitter Business. Twitter Post. December 5, 2018, 1:01 PM. <https://twitter.com/TwitterBusiness/status/1070423034467540992>.



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