Making Social Media Part of the Uniform
How policing solutions use #socialmedia to #buildcommunities and #fightcrime
Introduction

Policing is a people business. Whether seeking witnesses, supporting victims or liaising with local leaders, the police rely on human interaction and community involvement. Social media offers real-time access to tech-savvy, digitally-ready members of the public. Whether tweeting information or offering online portals to ease access to officers, police teams understand that social media can enhance the dialogue with citizens and make best use of their organization’s own limited resources. Combining power and productivity, social media is far more the rule than the exception in both the commercial and political world. The majority of Fortune 500 companies find social media essential to their operations and continually look for new ways to use it. According to a report from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, 34 percent of this year’s Fortune 500 companies are actively blogging, 77 percent maintain active Twitter accounts, 70 percent have Facebook pages, and 69 percent have YouTube accounts; usage of each platform increasing by about 4 percent among the top 500 from 2013. In short, social media is no longer a “nice to have,” but vital for law enforcement operations.

Social Media Maturity Model

The IACP Center for Social Media and Accenture developed the social media maturity model based on leading practices and interviews with several police departments. The model helps law enforcement agencies better assess their existing and potential social media capabilities.

Social media brings policing benefits such as:

- Increased detection of criminal activity
- Enhanced ability to combat new types of crime
- Increased citizen satisfaction
- Improved operational effectiveness and intelligence
- Greater return on investments

Social media’s coming of age

With a 20 percent increase in smartphone usage and tablet growth outstripping PCs on their best day, social distribution is happening fast. In fact, according to trend-watcher Mary Meeker, an average article reaches half of total social referrals in six and a half hours on Twitter and nine hours on Facebook. Such access to shared information is not lost on the police—and can be tailored to meet the needs, experience and resources of different forces in a number of ways. Using the law enforcement social media maturity model (see right), police organizations can assess where their agency is today in relation to other law enforcement agencies with respect to the integration of social media within their operations. From here, the model can illustrate the potential for advanced capabilities when higher levels of integration are embraced.

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1 Source: Internet Trends 2014, (Mary Meeker) May 28, 2014
**Collaborate**

*Collaborate internally*
- Share best practices throughout divisions within the agency
- Develop employee relationships, awareness, and morale

*Collaborate externally*
- Share best practices between agencies
- Consider joining/forming a regional networking group
- Liaison with local media
- Leverage the community to solve problems

**Detect**

*Enhance situational awareness*
- Real-time intelligence
- Constantly listen to social media buzz (pre-crime confession, organized threats)
- Global positioning of social media users, determine witnesses present at a crime scene

**Analyze and Prevent**

*Predictive policing*
- Analyze social media for crime-related buzz words
- Activity-based trends tracked by location

*Integrating social media with all data sources*
- Case files and databases
- Crime reports by location
- Global Positioning System data
- All publicly available data

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*Note that not all aspects of the model may be appropriate or practical for all law enforcement agencies; however, each agency can use the model to think broadly and evaluate various options when expanding their social media endeavors.*
#gettingstarted

So perhaps you are already committed to putting social media at the heart of your operations—where next? An initial consideration is the policy behind the process. First, determine who will have the authority to disseminate information on your police force’s behalf, and the nature of your organization’s “voice.” Once agreed, provide training to those responsible. Each organization is unique, and the size and scope of operations often dictates whether to centralize or decentralize public posting authority. For example, if you have a small organization with limited resources, consider delegating authority across all units within the department or using officers who volunteer for the task. Your organization must decide its own structure, with formal training for social media designees so that the agency projects one coherent and consistent voice.

#buildtrust

Communications are only effective if they are heard or seen and understood. In social media terms, this means developing a critical mass of “followers.” For a law enforcement agency, building a virtual network often begins with building trust among the local community. Social media helps to demonstrate organizational transparency, giving insight into the personalities, culture and way of working. In addition, a continuous stream of reliable information about ongoing cases, events in the local neighborhood, or even traffic and weather, can result in a community relying on these updates as a trusted news source.

However, communication is not a one-way street. Rather, you need to consider information sharing as part of a two-way dialogue that creates a virtual community. When there is evidence that the organization is listening and approachable, trust is established, encouraging active participation.

**Sergeant Sean Whitcomb, Seattle Police Department** Social media technology isn’t novel anymore. This is something agencies need to be trained on.

Like • Comment • Share

**Chief Billy Grogan, Dunwoody Police Department** Lessons Learned: Officers with a high interest in social media are more engaged and active on behalf of the organization.

Like • Comment • Share

**Public Information Officer Sherry Bray, Kentucky State Police** With a centralized approach we are able to have one voice and one tone.

Like • Comment • Share

**Sergeant Sean Whitcomb, Seattle Police Department** Social media is our electronic way of community policing. It’s the same as a citizen flagging down a police officer to ask a question. With social media, we are better able to engage with the community and, in many ways, we are more accessible.

Like • Comment • Share
The case of the missing burrito
The Palo Alto California Police Department is committed to two-way communications between its organization and the community, whatever the age group. To engage local teens, it is important to be active on the same wavelength, using the apps—and attitude—with which they are most familiar. In the United States, a group of local high school students tweeted a tongue-in-cheek SOS late one night to the Palo Alto Police Department asking for assistance in locating a “Missing in Action” burrito. The social media team played along, and responded with a humorous tweet that saw 50 more teen followers joining their community—a breakthrough with an age bracket that is typically difficult to reach.

Going along for a virtual ride
United States’ Palo Alto police Chief, Dennis Burns, took to the streets to host a virtual 12-hour ride-along in February 2013. The Palo Alto Police Department gave followers a virtual front seat view of a night in the life of the Palo Alto police via Twitter @PaloAltoPolice. Tweeting regular updates of encounters, citations, arrests, and snack breaks, Chief Burns and crew not only showed the community what it takes to protect and serve, but also gave citizens a glimpse of normally unseen real-world police business. The Palo Alto police are leading the way in terms of using unconventional media to reach a larger audience, with several initiatives targeted at hard-to-reach community members.

Viral Q&A
The United States’ Ocean County Police Department’s social media team hosted one of the first live chat session over Facebook with the local community. For several hours, a team of officers responded to questions that poured in via Facebook postings on topics that included everything from clarification on local laws to the origins of the word “cop.”

As the examples above show, using social media to share the efforts of your departments and officers going above and beyond the call of duty helps to not only build trust among community members, but also has the potential to yield equally important benefits within the police organization. Public recognition of individuals for their achievements and extraordinary service is known to increase morale and, in the long term, can create a more fulfilled force.
Tweeting the crime

The United States’ Seattle Police Department has taken collaboration to heart by offering the community the means to help it solve crimes. They created a special Twitter account, @getyourcarback, as a way to share information exclusively about stolen vehicles. The police agency then broadcasts the car details to the community—opening up the crime-solving potential to a vast number of people. The program has been successful at both reuniting community members with their vehicles and also raising awareness about the number and extent of stolen vehicles in the area.

Caring about sharing

The United States’ Kentucky State Police has noticed an increase in cases being solved through making one minor change to its social media strategy—asking the community to share. The Police Department has found that providing clear guidance and requests for assistance in social media outlets, such as simply stating “please share,” on a posting about a crime, increases the number of views and the likelihood of solving the case.

Once your community is well established, social media can be used to enhance situational awareness and manage crisis situations. Regardless of the size of your organization or the resources available, you can begin to access and use real-time intelligence via the social media channels. While it is important to know the climate of your community and social media policies first and foremost, even smaller agencies can increase their situational awareness through social media. From responding to citizen tips on social media to geo-sensing witnesses who may have been present near a crime scene and who could provide valuable evidence, social media can gather intelligence and detect crimes. In a recent survey, 50 percent of social networking site users were found to have shared or reposted news stories, images or videos. In this way, social media has the ability to gain its own momentum and help law enforcement officers gain superior intelligence. (see Figure 1).

With increasing numbers of people looking to social media as a news outlet, law enforcement organizations have an opportunity to not only gather additional information regarding a crisis, but also control the information released to the public, ensuring it is accurate and timely. Use your social media strategy to guide your crisis communications plan, such as dedicating a resource to monitor, respond to, and provide real-time accurate information via social media, liaising with local media to inform citizens, or setting up a new social media page specific to the crisis. Social media facilitates the effective management of crises by offering an additional channel to assess damage, control rumors, and provide accurate information.

Figure 1. Shared intelligence

- 50% Shared or reposted news stories, images or videos
- 46% Discussed a news issue or event
- 14% Posted photos they took of a news event
- 12% Posted videos they took of a news event

Fifty percent of social networking site users have shared or reposted news stories, images or videos and 14 percent of those surveyed have posted photos they took of a news event.

Note: This question was asked of social networking site users who also access news online.
The next frontier for social media is fully integrating it into police operations. Seamless integration between 911 operations, command centers, public information officers, tip lines and social media will not only provide better communications, but also provide more information on how and when to deploy limited resources.

Using social media, your law enforcement organization has an opportunity to share information more effectively to improve police operations. Once you have allocated the best resources to suit your own organization’s needs, be creative in how you use social media in your local community. Social media erases traditional barriers, such as geographic location, that hinder access to resources. Flexible and easily managed, social media can provide added benefits to law enforcement operations at every phase of implementation, from inform and listen stages through to analyzing and preventing crime. Find out what works for you. Whatever the size of your organization, you can realize rewards by taking steps toward making social media an essential element of your police operations.
About IACP

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is a dynamic organization that serves as the professional voice of law enforcement. Building on our past success, the IACP addresses cutting-edge issues confronting law enforcement through advocacy, programs, and research, as well as training and other professional services. IACP is a comprehensive professional organization that supports the law enforcement leaders of today and develops the leaders of tomorrow. IACP launched its Center for Social Media in October 2010. The goal of the Center is to build the capacity of law enforcement to use social media to prevent and solve crimes, strengthen police-community relations, and enhance services. IACP’s Center for Social Media serves as a clearinghouse of information and no-cost resources to help law enforcement personnel develop or enhance their agency’s use of social media and integrate Web 2.0 tools into agency operations. For more information, please contact: socialmedia@theiacp.org.

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