

Pinterest for Parent Education

Abstract

As more parents are using the Internet to answer their questions, Extension needs to provide practical, research-based resources in an accessible format. Pinterest is a platform that can be used by Extension educators to provide continued education and make reputable resources more discoverable for parents. Based on Knowles adult learning theory and user demographics, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development (ECFD) started a successful Pinterest pilot in August 2013. From this experience, we have provided recommendations successfully developing and maintaining a Pinterest page for educational purposes that can be used by other Extension educators in their work.

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Introduction

University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development (ECFD) aims to provide practical, research-based information that families can trust in an accessible format. In today's world, "accessible" is synonymous with "online," with most 18-29 year olds (94%) and 30-49 year olds (87%) using the Internet regularly (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). Most parents (85.9%) cite the Internet in the top three "useful" or "very useful" sources for parenting information (Walker, Dworkin, & Connell, 2011). New technologies are forcing Extension to reevaluate traditional programming, with increased use of online information (Seger, 2011). Extension must leverage online media as educational tools to increase the prevalence and accessibility (or "discoverability") of reliable resources to online audiences (Sagor & Potyondy, 2011).

Search engines are not the only ways adults find parenting information online. Most 18-29 year olds (89%) are using social media (Brenner & Smith, 2013). Thirty-one million digital natives are parents, and many are going to online sources for parenting information: websites, blogs, videos, online classes, and social media (Walker et al., 2011; Fromm, 2013).

Social media platforms such as Pinterest can aggregate solutions-based content and can help adult learners to access relevant information that is responsive to their learning needs and preferences. Pinterest is a social content discovery and curation website that allows a user to "pin" images and repin, like, or comment on other users' pins. A pin is an image (photo, graphic, video still) linked to

the source. "Pinning" is adding a pin to a board (defined topic), i.e., curating content. Figure 1 shows an example of a pin with multiple follower interactions, i.e., repins and likes.

Figure 1.
Example Pin on Pinterest Board



For Extension, using tools such as Pinterest is one way to increase discoverability of reliable online resources to parent audiences already using this platform. ECFD developed a Pinterest page in 2013 for the curation of research-based content and resources relevant to parents (find page here: <http://www.pinterest.com/UMNfamily/>). Gharis, Brandon, Evans, Hubbard, and Taylor (2014) outlined opportunities for social media in Extension such as timely and relevant dissemination, collaboration, transparency, and knowledge sharing that are easily met through Pinterest (2014). Table 1 below outlines how the Pinterest platform can address these opportunities and all four principles of andragogy, or strategies for engaging adult learners, compiled by Knowles (1984).

Table 1.
How Pinterest Addresses Andragogy

| Principles of Andragogy | Why Pinterest Works |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction. | Users select which ECFD content boards to follow and what resources to repin; they are selecting the information they would like to learn and evaluating content provided with repins and likes. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities. | Users repin, like, or comment on relevant information they see, as well as read, watch, listen to, or take action based on the resources pinned to ECFD boards. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults are most interested | Resources pinned on ECFD boards are usually |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.</p> | <p>situation-specific, solutions-based, and can be directly applied to personal situations.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented. | <p>Resources pinned on ECFD boards provide possible solutions to immediate situations parents are encountering.</p> |

An Interest in Pinterest

The current typical Pinterest user is likely a female between 18 and 50 years old, and there is a 1 in 2 chance she is a parent (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Gaille, 2013). Pinterest's most frequent topics include Home, Food, Kids, and Inspiration/Education (Gaille, 2013). Because of the user base and content trends, we determined that Pinterest would be an effective social media platform for reaching young parents, particularly moms, with resources on topics relevant to ECFD such as food safety, healthy recipes, parenting strategies, and money management with kids.

The ECFD Pinterest account was created August 2013. Since that time, the account has gained over 200 followers. We have pinned over 641 resources to our 19 different boards and had resources repinned 681 times.

The ECFD page has a virality score of 1.1 (repins per pin) and an engagement score of 36.2% (percent of pins with at least 1 repin) according to Tailwind analytics (Tailwind, 2014). Some repins are due to Pinterest users seeing our resources when they are initially posted. Other repins are due to users searching for specific information, browsing our boards of previously pinned resources, or seeing the item pinned by another user. This asynchronous repinning means that some ECFD pins are repinned months after they were originally posted. This finding reveals an additional advantage of Pinterest: the initial investment in creating or locating a good pin can yield results over time with little to no additional investment.

Neither Pinterest nor external social media management tools have a way to track demographics, total reach or visibility of pins, or knowledge gained. However, the reach of followers and engagement by repinning indicate that Pinterest increases the discoverability of Extension content.

Pin It to Win It

Social media as an educational tool is one way for Extension to effectively reach people (Seeger, 2011). ECFD's Pinterest page shows that this social media platform offers an opportunity to broaden reach and deepen impact.

Educators have indicated that they need step-by step guidelines and direction for social media, so how do you go from novice pinner to total winner (O'Neill, 2011)? Table 2 outlines questions to consider before you create an official site. This content strategy statement can be used to determine what

content boards you might develop: "We will [do/provide this] [for these people] so that they can [do this]."

Table 2.
Before You Get a URL

| | Question to Address | Our Pinterest Example |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Know Your Audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your target demographic use this site? • What topics are they interested in? • How do they like information presented? | <p><i>User:</i> 68.2% female, 50% with children, 77.5% between 18-44</p> <p><i>Topics:</i> Kids, Food, DIY</p> <p><i>Presentation:</i> visually appealing, colorful, descriptive pictures</p> |
| Know Your Goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your learning objectives? • What outcomes will define success for this site? | <p><i>Objective:</i> Extend content reach</p> <p><i>Metric:</i> Growing number of followers and repins</p> |
| Know Your Potential Pins | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What content do you already have that can be provided to consumers? • What qualifications do you have for including outside information? • What is your maintenance plan for posting new material? | <p><i>Content:</i> ECFD web pages</p> <p><i>Must Be:</i> Evidence-Based, visually appealing, relatable, timely</p> <p><i>Plan:</i> Schedule future pins using Hootsuite</p> |

Once you've worked through the questions in Table 2 and feel confident in opening an account, Table 3 will help you begin pinning. We recommend treating the first 6 months to a year of your time on Pinterest as a pilot. This mindset sets you up to solicit feedback frequently, adjust your plan, and pull the plug, if necessary.

Table 3.
Up and Running

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| | Questions to |
|--|---------------------|

| | Address | Our Pinterest Example |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Curate the Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your content strategy statements? • How will you pin current, relevant content regularly? | <p><i>Statement:</i> We will provide strategies for parents to increase fruits and vegetable intake with their children.</p> <p><i>Content:</i> Review internal and external resources, repin follower content, use action statements in pin description</p> |
| Communicate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are multiple ways to address those content strategies? • How can you get the word out to potential users? | <p><i>Strategies:</i> Pin related resources on multiple boards, use hashtags, space out when pins are posted</p> <p><i>Share:</i> Put links on your website, give URL to participants, follow and repin from others</p> |
| Critique | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can provide feedback? • Do the metrics support the site goals and objectives? • What changes could benefit the site? | <p><i>Review:</i> Site review by coworker or potential participant</p> <p><i>Support:</i> Growing number of followers, repins occurring in all boards</p> <p><i>Adjustment:</i> Modify content, maintenance plans, and pinning strategies to better meet audience needs</p> |

Be sure to assess your ability to maintain a social media site throughout the development and evaluation process. A lethargic, out-of-date social media presence can be more detrimental for your organizational brand than no presence at all. If you aren't sure you have the skills, time, resources, or support to start a site, be sure to explore the platform and connect with others who have been successful to assess your readiness.

Conclusion

Although social media is no longer a new platform for connection, it is still an underused tool for education. Based on these three assumptions, we believe Pinterest is an effective educational tool.

- Parents are already on Pinterest.

- Pinterest satisfies all of Knowles principles of adult learning.
- Pinning increases information discoverability.

However, evaluation tools are limited in Pinterest, and more research is needed to validate that Pinterest is an effective means for education. Social content discovery and curation platforms such as Pinterest can advance Extension's charge to provide practical, research-based parenting information that families can trust in an accessible format.

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