Increasing the Capacity of Social Media to Extend Your Outreach

Abstract

To increase audience size and maximize use of Extension materials and information, Extension professionals can capitalize on the potential of social media. They can broaden their use of social media beyond what is familiar to sites they have not used previously. They can expand the functionality of social media sites they use by adding share and follow buttons, inserting widgets, and embedding videos and slides. And they can increase traffic to sources of Extension information by linking from wherever possible to Extension materials on social media sites and elsewhere online. Use of the tips provided in this article can result in thousands of additional exposures to Extension materials.

Patricia Brinkman
Assistant Professor
Extension Educator
Ohio State University
Extension
Washington Court
House, Ohio
brinkman.93@osu.edu

Joanne Kinsey
Associate Professor
Extension Educator
Rutgers Cooperative
Extension
Atlantic and Ocean
Counties
New Brunswick, New
Jersey
jkinsey@njaes.rutgers
.edu

Alice Henneman
Extension Educator
University of
Nebraska–Lincoln
Extension
Lincoln, Nebraska
ahenneman1@unl.edu

Social Media Helps Expand and Sustain Outreach

With over 65% of the population using social media platforms—and, in particular, 90% of young adults aged 18–29 participating in social media (Perrin, 2015)—Extension's presence on social media is a necessity. As Gharis, Bardon, Evans, Hubbard, and Taylor (2014) explained, "Social media offers Extension professionals the ability to reach new audiences, provide professional guidance and direction, and encourage peer-to-peer interactions while meeting the land-grant Extension mission of increasing knowledge, changing behavior and assessing the impacts of their programmatic efforts" ("Introduction," para.1).

Using social media is a strategy for reaching additional Extension audiences beyond those reached by person-to-person programming. Social media allows those of us who work in Extension to communicate over longer periods of time with our clients, thereby increasing impacts and long-range outcomes. People can engage with us via social media by following us, subscribing to our content, and liking us.

Popular social media sites include blogs, Facebook, Flickr, Pinterest, SlideShare, Twitter, Vimeo, and YouTube. In the sections that follow, we provide brief descriptions of how Extension professionals commonly use these sites plus suggestions for extending the reach capacity of each site. For brevity's sake, the discussion is limited to particular aspects of these popular social media outlets; check a particular site for

additional sharing possibilities. Also, keep in mind that the number of sharing possibilities is likely to increase in the future as new forms of social media emerge.

Extension's Use of Popular Social Media Sites

In this section, we give basic descriptions of popular social media sites and comment on ways in which Extension professionals can use them. To implement the suggested tips and techniques, check the help features on each social media site for specific directions.

- A blog is a collection of written articles. You can use a blog to provide research-based information on various subjects.

- Facebook is an interactive site where users share information, events, and messages. With 72% of Internet users on Facebook.com (Pew Research Center, 2015), Facebook is a key to expanding your audience. People enjoy Facebook's post engagement and interaction capability, through which they can comment on content on the site (Parsons, 2015).

- Flickr is an online photo- and video-sharing site.

- Pinterest is an image-sharing site that includes links to other sites where users can find more information related to images of interest to them.

- SlideShare allows you to upload and share presentations, infographics, documents, and videos for public viewing.

- Twitter lets users post 140-character messages, called "tweets," that can include hashtags and images.

- Vimeo and YouTube are video-sharing sites that you can use to upload and share program-related and other educational videos.

Tips and Techniques for Extending Outreach Beyond the Basics

You can go beyond the basics and use the strategies presented here to add extra impact and expand the outreach of each of the forms of social media you use. In many cases, you can use one form of social media to help promote outreach through another form of social media.

- In your email signature, include links to your website and all forms of social media you use.

- In each of your social media profiles (or "About" sections), include links to your website and to all the other forms of social media you use.

- Create "share" buttons to link to the social media you use from your website and/or blog and any e-newsletters you generate.

- Embed on your website and/or blog various videos you have posted on Vimeo or YouTube or presentations you have uploaded to SlideShare. Also, share those same videos and presentations on Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter. Be sure to explore how to use the sharing capabilities of each of these social media sites.

Some sites include options that allow you to share directly from one social media site to another. For example, you can share YouTube videos on Pinterest and via Twitter, among other possibilities.

Techniques Unique to Specific Social Media Platforms

There are certainly similarities in the ways social media sites can be used. However, there are also unique features that allow you to get the most out of each social media site. Here we identify some unique ways to use specific sites.

Facebook.com

- Create interest-area groups, which users can "like" (join).

Flickr.com

- When uploading a photo, include a link to your website, blog, or another social media site in the photo description to direct visitors to a location where they can find additional information, a recipe, or how-to directions.

Pinterest.com

- Create Pinterest widgets to place on blogs and websites, which allow visitors to view what is on a specific pinboard or your total Pinterest site. Other widgets permit pinning an item directly from a web page.

SlideShare.net

- Before uploading a presentation, a PDF handout, or another item, insert hyperlinks in the file to direct viewers to other Extension materials. SlideShare hyperlinks are clickable, making it easy to access other web locations.

Twitter.com

- Use a web address shortening tool, such as bit.ly, for hyperlinks to allow for more message content.

- Create a Twitter widget showing your latest tweets to place on your website/blog. Twitter widgets allow people to view and interact with your tweets.

Examples of Successfully Extending Social Media Outreach

The following examples from our work illustrate how we reached additional people by using the previously discussed strategies from March 2015 to March 2016. Similar types of statistics are not available from all social media sites.

- 1,017 people visited a blog in 2015 as a result of links from Facebook, Pinterest, Slideshare, and Twitter.

- 35,950 people visited a website as a result of links from Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter.

- 896 YouTube views (71% of total views) were from locations where the videos were embedded.

- 66,930 SlideShare views (60% of total views) were from locations where the slides were embedded.

- 72 outbound clicks to resource hyperlinks were recorded from a SlideShare presentation.

- 167 Vimeo video views resulted from an embed on a website; 21 views resulted when the video was shared on Facebook; and 10 views occurred when the video was shared on Pinterest.

- 123 shares of a Pinterest pin resulted from a Pin It button placed on a website for an article.

Summary

We were able to generate an additional 100,000-plus exposures to Extension materials by implementing techniques described in this article to go beyond the basic uses of common social media sites. By linking social media sites, Extension professionals can create more exposure to Extension materials and information (Skrabut, 2014).

References

Gharis, L. W., Bardon, R. E., Evans, J. L., Hubbard, W. G., & Taylor, E. (2014). Expanding the reach of Extension through social media. *Journal of Extension*, *52*(3) Article 3FEA3. Available at: https://www.joe.org/joe/2014june/a3.php

Parsons, M. (2015). Social media tools for the Extension toolbox. *Journal of Extension*, *53*(2) Article 2TOT7. Available at: https://www.joe.org/joe/2015april/tt7.php

Perrin, A. (2015). *Social media usage 2005-2015*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/08/social-networking-usage-2005-2015/

Pew Research Center. (2015). *Facebook demographics*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19_social-media-update_07/

Skrabut, S. (2014). Save time and increase social media reach by using IFTTT—If this, then that. *Journal of Extension*, *52*(5) Article 5TOT2. Available at: https://www.joe.org/joe/2014october/tt2.php