IACP
International Association of Chiefs of Police

Facebook

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

Facebook provides your agency an opportunity to connect with your community, build trust, and increase transparency. Not only does it have a large audience, but Facebook is unique in that it is popular among all demographic groups according to the Pew Research Center.[i]

Think of Facebook as the virtual space where the community and your department get to know each other and build a stronger relationship. Pushing your news and updates out fast and frequently emphasizes your agency as the best source of information rather than other typical media outlets.

WHAT MAKES FACEBOOK DIFFERENT?

Facebook Live

This feature lets you stream a live event, interact with the audience while it is happening, and post it when it ends so users can watch the whole video later. This is a great opportunity to build your community engagement. Good opportunities for Facebook Live are press conferences, on-scene briefings, or community events.

BE READY

DEVELOPING A FACEBOOK STRATEGY

Posting

If you want to promote it, you should post it on Facebook. Press releases, alerts, suspect IDs, or questions to engage the community are all useful options. Get creative and post video updates or other content to share with the community about upcoming events, programs, or other fun opportunities.

Facebook Messenger

Don't forget about Facebook Messenger. Your community may reach out via Messenger with questions, comments, concerns, or to report a crime. Use this as a communication tool to provide a semi-confidential space for reporting.

Commenting on posts

Commenting allows a unique opportunity for engagement with your community. You will need a policy for commenting. When creating your policy for comments, some questions to consider are:

- Will you reply to comments?
- How will your department decide whether to hide or delete a comment?

PLATFORM PARTICULARS

- **2.23 billion** people log in every month. 66% log in daily.[ii]

- **Five profiles** are created every second.[iii]

- Facebook is the **3rd most-visited** website behind Google and YouTube.[iv]

- **62%** of people ages 65 and older are Facebook users.[iv]

- People **look 5x longer** at video posts than static ones.[vi]

Often these policies have already been defined, or need to be defined, by your legal and/or communications department. Make sure the right people are involved in your decision making.

BEWARE

THE PITFALLS

There will be negative comments on your posts. You need to have policies in place, and people prepared to act on these policies. Have decisions made about what would make you delete or hide a comment from a user, and whether you can delete or hide one of your posts, before the situation occurs so emotions are left out of the process.

The Facebook algorithm arranges users' news feed posts in such a way that your agency's posts may not appear right away to all of your followers, so caution should be exercised when posting time-sensitive or emergency information on Facebook.

Tips, Tricks, and Strategies to Consider

- Have a defined strategy for using Facebook. It is the ideal platform for questions and ongoing engagement. Decide which types of content you will post, how often, and how you will interact with your virtual community on Facebook.

- Ensure your Facebook 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, Facebook's style, and large character limit.

- Have a Social Media Manager and a designated backup, who both are knowledgeable in the nuances of Facebook. 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 Facebook 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 Gramlich, John. "Facts about Americans and Facebook." *Pew Research Center* 10

ii Ibid.

iii "Top 20 Facebook Statistics–Zephoria Inc. March 01, 2019. Accessed April 03, 2019. https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/.

iv Kemp, Simon. "Internet Growth Accelerates, but Facebook Ad Engagement Tumbles." We Are Social. July 25, 2018. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/07/internet-growth-accelerates-but-facebook-ad-engagement-tumbles.

vi Salman.Aslam.Mughal. "Facebook by the Numbers (2019): Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts." January 06, 2019. Accessed April 03, 2019. https://www.omnicoreagency.com/facebook-statistics/.

v Ibid.

vii "Shifts for 2020: Multisensory Multipliers." Facebook IQ. June 20, 2017. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/business/news/insights/shifts-for-2020-multisensory-multipliers.