

Moving Your Volunteer Program Forward with Social Media

With more than one billion users on Facebook and more than 100,000 tweets posted to Twitter each minute, it is clear that social media is not just a fad, it is *the* new form of communication. Social media is used across age groups and across industries. According to a recent survey by IACP's Center for Social Media, 92.4 percent of law enforcement agencies are using some type of social media. Agencies are using social media for investigations, emergency notifications, crime prevention, and more. This issue of *VIPS in Focus* explores how your law enforcement volunteer program can tap in to the power of social media.

About Social Media Platforms

Social and Professional Networks

Facebook, MySpace, Google+, LinkedIn

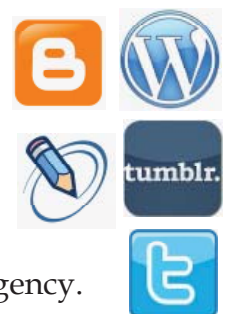
Social networks allow people to share information, activities, thoughts, and events with other individuals within their network. Users will have an individual profile page to which they can add photos, links, and personal updates. Users can connect their profile with those of their friends, family, and individuals with similar interests in order to share their profile content. An increasing number of businesses and government agencies are creating organizational profiles to share information with their customers and community members. Each tool varies somewhat in the terms used for site activities. The most common social network today is Facebook, on which individuals can "like" an agency to receive updates. LinkedIn is a professional social network that allows users to create a profile summarizing their work experience and to link to educational and professional associates. It can also be used to look for and promote jobs and volunteer opportunities.



Blogs/Microblogs

Blogger, WordPress, LiveJournal, Tumblr, Twitter

Blogs, short for web logs, are websites that allow for sharing text, photo, and video content. Entries are called posts and will appear on the blog in reverse chronological order with the newest post at the top. Common blog websites include Blogger, Live Journal, and Word Press. These websites are easy to use and set up so that you can post information in a standard word processing format. While entries are typically kept brief, blogs allow for longer, more detailed information than other social media platforms. Blogs may share the thoughts and updates of an individual like a police chief or sheriff, or they may feature multiple contributors from different parts of an agency. Tumblr is a popular blogging platform that allows for shorter posts with images, videos,

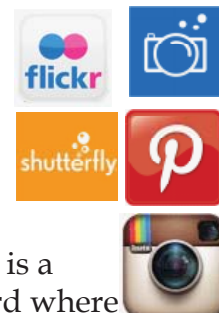


text, and music that are quick and easy to update from mobile devices. Microblogs are platforms for very short alerts or updates. Twitter is the most commonly used microblogging site. Messages, called “tweets,” are limited to 140 characters. Twitter is very popular with law enforcement agencies for its ease of use and ability to get real-time information out to the public about events, traffic issues, or emergencies.

Photo Sharing Sites

Flickr, Photobucket, Shutterfly, Pinterest; Instagram

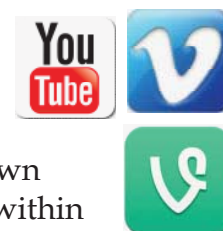
Trends in social media have moved toward less text and more visual appeal. Photos are essential to getting noticed and gaining followers. There are a number of websites on which you can upload photos to share with the public at no cost. Most of these sites allow for viewers to interact by posting comments. Flickr, Shutterfly, and Photo Bucket are photo sharing sites that can be set to be viewed by the general public or privately by your group. Photos can be arranged into galleries, so you can highlight different projects or add a volunteer program gallery to your agency’s page. Pinterest is a fast growing site for sharing images and links. It functions like an online bulletin board where users are able to organize and share items they find on the Internet. For immediate photo sharing from special events, you can use the Instagram application (app) to quickly upload a photo from your smartphone to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Many programs have volunteer photographers who document events, and these individuals can help add content to your photo galleries.



Video Sharing Sites

YouTube, Vimeo, Vine

In recent years, creating videos has become less costly and much easier and more accessible. Anyone with a smart phone has the capability to become an amateur videographer. You Tube is by far the most common video sharing website. More than four billion hours of video are watched each month on You Tube, and it is the second most used search engine in the world. You Tube allows users to create their own channels, where they can upload videos. You also have the option to create playlists within your channel, so you can group together volunteer program videos. Vimeo is a video sharing site similar to You Tube. Vine is a new social media sensation through which users post videos that are no more than six-seconds long, a testament to the “less is more” mentality of social media.



Getting Started with Social Media

Before you start using any social media, it is important to develop a strategy and determine your goals for using social media. Are you looking to recruit new volunteers, communicate with current volunteers, or promote events to the community? Working from those goals, determine which social media platforms will work best for your agency.

Many agencies have already begun using social media and will have a point person in charge of all social media messaging. Often the point person is the Public Information Officer. If your agency already has a social media manager, talk to him or her about how you can leverage your agency’s current social media practices to promote volunteer activities. It is important to find out what policies

and procedures regulate your agency’s social media use. Policies may dictate how your agency will use social media, who in the agency is allowed to post information, what content is acceptable, and what guidelines apply to personal social media use. If your agency does not have a social media policy, you can download a model policy from the IACP Center for Social Media. (*click here to view the Social Media Model Policy*). If volunteers will post information, they should receive training on your social media goals and policies.

Social Media in the Field

In the quickly evolving field of social media, new ideas are being tested all the time to tell stories in a new way, reach new audiences, and maximize the impact of your message. In this section, we will look at some of the ways that law enforcement volunteer programs are using social media to recruit, recognize, and communicate with volunteers. We will also look at ways that volunteers are using social media in the course of their duties.

Recruitment

Social media is now one of the primary means for individuals to get their news, so it is important to spread the word about volunteer needs and special events. With your volunteer base helping to share your recruitment messages within their own social networks, it is easy to cast a wide net with minimal effort. Recruitment messages may be simple announcements about application deadlines or volunteer informational meetings, or they may seek to show and tell the story of what it is like to be a volunteer for your agency.

The *Arlington, Texas, Police Department* (APD) held a “Tweet-Along” to showcase a typical Citizens on Patrol volunteer shift. It was essentially a virtual ride along for APD’s online community. The department’s social media specialist rode with a volunteer and used her smart phone to send messages out on Twitter about the volunteer’s activities. Tweets included information about a volunteer calling in a suspicious vehicle, a report of quiet parking lots, and some crime prevention tips. Tweet-Along followers were encouraged to interact by posting questions. APD holds these Tweet-Alongs on a regular basis to highlight different aspects of the department. Other Tweet-Alongs featured a DWI Task Force and a patrol shift with a sworn officer. In 2012, APD received an award for Most Innovative Use of Social Media for their Tweet Along program from Center for Digital Government Best of Texas Awards. APD regularly makes use of Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube to share news about the volunteer program. They recently shared a COP Mobile recruitment video on You Tube. (*Watch the video.*)



The *Kentwood, Michigan, Police Department* (KPD) teamed up with a local cable channel to produce a volunteer recruitment video. The cable videographers came to KPD's volunteer open house after receiving a press release from the volunteer coordinator. The cable company took care of video recording duties and expenses. The result was a professional quality video featuring interviews with the chief, volunteer coordinators, and active volunteers. The video was played on the cable television station and posted to YouTube. (*Watch the video.*)



Social media trends and fads can be hard to predict. Sometimes an image, video, or message becomes so viral that it can be seen all over popular culture, and many of these viral sensations were designed to make people laugh. A sense of humor, judiciously applied, can be a good way for agencies to get people's attention. Law enforcement social media managers report that their humorous posts often generate the most interaction.

The *Tampa, Florida, Police Department* (TPD) got in on a recent viral social media craze by making their own "Harlem Shake" video to promote involvement in their Neighborhood Watch program. The original "Harlem Shake" video featuring a catchy song and silly dance was a viral trend on YouTube that brought about spoof videos ranging from dancing high school students to dancing dogs. TPD's video featured a staged home theft, a diverse group of neighbors, dancing dispatchers, and a closing message about working together to "shake crime out of our neighborhoods." TPD worked with a local radio station to produce and promote the video and used actual Neighborhood Watch members and TPD staff in the video. The video is fun and attention grabbing, and it humanizes the department and the Neighborhood Watch program. The final seconds of the video provide follow up steps on how to get involved in the program. (*Watch the video.*)



[Click here to learn more about the Tampa Police Department's Neighborhood Watch Program.](#)

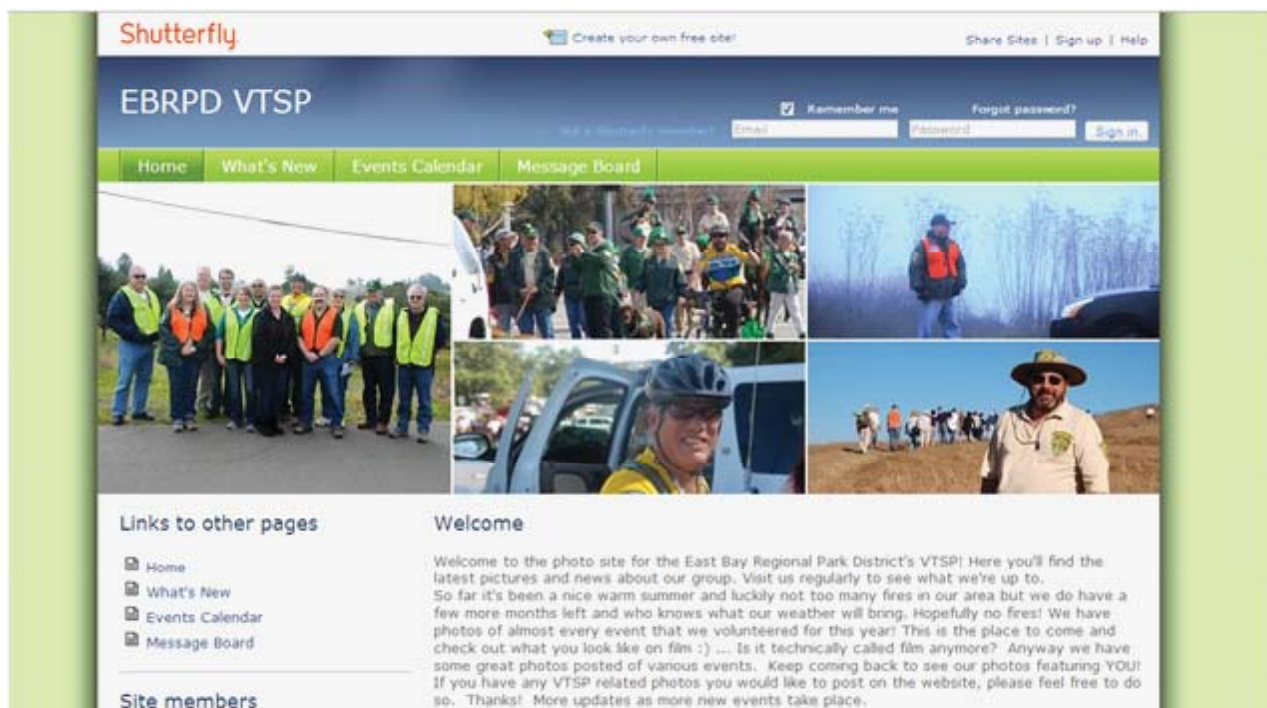
Communicating with Volunteers

Social media offers a number of tools to help you communicate with your volunteers. Most social networking pages can be made public if you would like to use it to promote your program or private if you intend to use it solely for communication with volunteers. You can make these sites interactive by encouraging volunteers to contribute stories, share photos and video, and provide feedback on events. Google offers calendar and document sharing services that can be password protected and made available to the volunteer group for scheduling and tracking hours.



The *Omaha, Nebraska, Police Department* Volunteers in Police Service Program uses Facebook to communicate with volunteers. The volunteer manager post photos of volunteer events, news stories, new volunteer positions, reminders to submit hours, links to content from the main Omaha Police Department Facebook page, and messages of thanks to the volunteers. Volunteers can interact by following the page, “liking” or commenting on posts, and posting their own photos. (*View the page.*)

The *East Bay, California, Regional Parks Police Department* Volunteer Trail Safety Patrol uses Shutterfly to post photos from special events, trainings, and testing sessions. Volunteers can view photo galleries organized by event and leave comments in the guestbook. The volunteer coordinator and a small group of volunteers post the majority of the photos, but all members of the site have the option to post photos. The volunteer coordinator monitors the site to ensure that only photos of authorized volunteer activities are posted. (*View the gallery.*) Photo galleries are a fun way to keep volunteers up to date on volunteer activities. Individuals enjoy seeing photos of themselves and their fellow volunteers, and looking at photos may encourage other volunteers to sign up for future events.



Recognition

One of the many advantages of social media is being able to reach a large audience, allowing unique opportunities to recognize your agency's law enforcement volunteers. You can magnify the impact of the recognition via social media by getting the message out to their friends, neighbors, families, and colleagues. Recognizing your volunteers publicly has the side benefits of inspiring new volunteers to get involved and sharing positive stories about your agency with the community.

The *Santa Cruz, California, Police Department* uses its agency blog to share volunteer interviews. These question and answer posts allow the agency to showcase the work and motivations of the volunteer in his or her own words. (Read a sample post.) Volunteers are motivated most by their desire to help their law enforcement agency and community, and your agency's blog and Facebook page are great places to share stories about a volunteer's specific accomplishments and how they impacted your agency. You can promote or recap events, profile volunteers, or highlight specific volunteer jobs. Blogs and Facebook can be more conversational than your standard press releases. Catchy titles, fun facts, statistics, and photos are good ways to bring readers in. Volunteers can help write blog posts. Giving them a "Guest Blogger" byline is a great way to recognize their contribution.



The *Cape Coral, Florida, Police Department* posted videos from a recent volunteer awards ceremony on the agency's YouTube channel. (Watch the video.) This is a nice way to incorporate volunteers who could not attend the event, but also shows how much the agency values the volunteer program. Awards and honors are great content for Facebook and Twitter updates, as are concrete statistics from the program as whole, like the numbers of vacation home checks performed, victims served, or children fingerprinted.

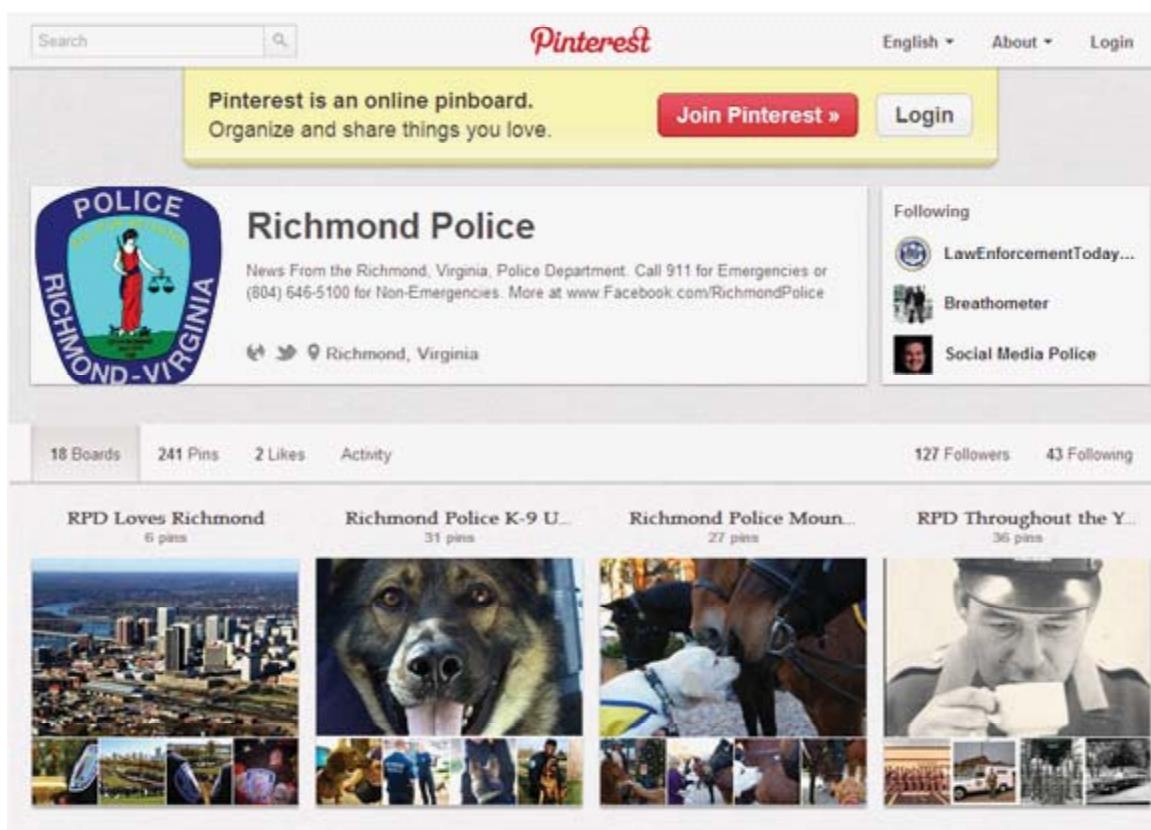
Sharing monthly, quarterly, or yearly updates about the number of volunteer hours multiplied by the value of a volunteer hour (currently \$22.14) is a good way to promote your program’s value to the community.

LinkedIn now offers the opportunity to endorse users for certain skills and expertise. Endorsing volunteers for the skills they use in their volunteer work is a great way to show that you value their work. This can be particularly meaningful for interns and young professional volunteers. *(Read more about LinkedIn Skill Endorsements).*

Volunteer Tasks Using Social Media

In some instances, social media tools can be used in day-to-day volunteer duties. There is a vast amount of information available in the social media realm, and volunteers have the time and expertise to harness the power of social media to search for information, research trends, or help generate content to promote your volunteer program.

The *Richmond, Virginia, Police Department* (RPD) uses interns in the Public Affairs Unit. One of their responsibilities is to generate new content ideas for RPD’s social media pages. The interns helped RPD craft messages that would appeal to younger audiences. RPD had recently started a Pinterest page, and the Public Information Officer (PIO) found that the interns, who were regular Pinterest users personally, had good instincts and suggestions as to what would be popular on the site. Their suggestions included sharing funny police-related images from internal and external sources; food boards that featured recipes from officers who cook or bake; and historical photos. *(View the page.)* When working with interns on social media, the RPD PIO recommends giving lots of guidance along the way and always reviewing the work before it is posted.



Pasadena, California, Police Department

volunteers use social media to support missing person searches. The volunteer Missing Persons Unit (MPU) was created in 2008 to reduce the load on Pasadena investigators. MPU Volunteer Investigators use a variety of resources in their investigations: phone records, state level missing persons records, national records from the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), and social media. They use Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, personal blog, instant messaging sites, and other resources to look into the missing person's "Virtual Life." Here they may find information about recent activities and locations where the person was last seen; aliases or alternate contact information; and information about friends who may be able to provide additional details. Volunteers find that particularly in the case of runaway juveniles that social media allows them to find important details that can help bring a case to closure.

Social media continues to expand and evolve and with it comes new ways to recruit volunteers, stay in touch, reward their efforts, and maximize their efficiency in the course of their duties.

Resources:**IACP Center for Social Media**

The Center for Social Media has a wide variety of tools, tutorials, publications, case studies, and other resources to help you plan and implement your social media strategy - <http://www.iacpsocialmedia.org/>

VIPS Resource Library

Browse and download sample documents from law enforcement volunteer programs, such as program descriptions, position descriptions, and policy and procedures for volunteer programs. Visit www.policevolunteers.org/resources/library

VIPS to VIPS Listserv

VIPS to VIPS allows contact person(s) from registered VIPS programs to post questions, share information, and problem-solve challenges related to law enforcement volunteer programs. This page archives postings from the VIPS to VIPS discussion group. This page is password protected and is available to the contact person(s) from registered VIPS programs.

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program works to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. VIPS serves as a gateway to resources and information for and about law enforcement volunteer programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.



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