

Save Time and Increase Social Media Reach by Using IFTTT- If This, Then That

Abstract

Extension educators, staff, and specialists are finding that social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs are powerful ways to disseminate educational content, announce events, and promote Extension services. The challenge to using all of these various tools is the lack of time. Tools such as IFTTT (If This, Then That) can help to automate the distribution and collection of important content. This article discusses how to use IFTTT and offers suggestions for its use.

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Introduction

How we communicate has evolved over the course of time. Technology use has increased the speed and size of audience for our messages. Social media triggered the most revolutionary change to our ability to communicate (Semple, 2012; Shirky, 2008). Extension across the nation has become aware of the importance of social media as reflective of the number of different surveys on the topic (Cooper, Cox, & Corbin, 2012; Diem, Hino, Martin, & Meisenbach, 2011; O'Neill, Zumwalt, & Bechman, 2011; Robideau & Santl, 2011).

Extension is finding social media tools are useful for disseminating research-based information, showing instructional videos, announcing events, recruiting volunteers, providing peer support, delivering educational content, sharing news briefs and government reports, building connections, enhancing professional development efforts, and marketing programs (Cater, Davis, Leger, Machtmes, & Arcemont, 2013; Cooper et al., 2012; Kinsey, 2010; Mains, Jenkins-Howard, & Stephenson, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2011). A plethora of social media tools including those common to Extension such as Facebook, YouTube, wikis, blogs, podcasts, (Kinsey, 2010), and Twitter support these efforts. However, to extend our outreach, we must also consider using numerous other social media tools such as Instagram, Flickr, Diigo, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Vimeo, and Reddit.

Time is one factor that seems to limit Extension educator's ability to do more, including programming, outreach, and communicating (Mains et al., 2013). Time is also one of the primary reasons why

Extension educators and specialists do not use social media tools more (Cater et al., 2013; Diem et al., 2011; Kinsey, 2010). What if there was a tool that could help speed disseminating a message to more people? IFTTT may be that tool.

IFTTT (If This, Then That)

IFTTT is an acronym for If This, Then That. IFTTT automatically carries out an action when a specific action occurs. IFTTT has 82 channels. The channels are the major building blocks of a recipe. Recipes include a trigger and an action based on channels. These channels include common applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and many others. There are also channels based on time and date, location, and physical devices such as Philips Hue, SmartThings, WeMo switches, and Netatmo temperature controllers. The first part of the recipe is a trigger - the "this" portion of the recipe. When a trigger activates, an action on a designated channel will occur. An action is the "that" portion of the recipe. When turned on, IFTTT automatically polls recipes every 15 minutes unless the user prescribes another time.

To use IFTTT, create an account at <https://ifttt.com/>. Once logged into IFTTT, register or activate the channels you wish to use.

To create a recipe, begin by selecting a trigger channel. With a trigger channel selected, identify the ingredients or pieces of data that will activate the trigger. For example, if using the date and time channel, select from the following ingredients: every day at _____, every hour at _____, every day of the week at _____, every month on the _____, and every year on _____. If using the RSS feed channel, the trigger can be programmed to fire on every new feed item or when a feed item specifically matches a keyword or phrase. With a trigger completed, decide upon the action by selecting the appropriate channel. Again, the user must choose the type of action to accomplish. If using the Evernote channel, you could select from options such as create a note, append to a note, append to a to-do note, create a link note, create an image note from URL, or create an audio note from URL. Each action has its own ingredients from which to choose. If a note action is created, you would have to complete the following fields: title, message body, notebook, and tags. You finalize the recipe creation in the end.

IFTTT has a library of recipes from which to choose. By searching on a specific channel, users can update and use a recipe to serve their own needs.

Recipe Examples

Here is a list of recipes to help you get started.

- If posting a YouTube video, have it post to Facebook, WordPress, Tumblr, Twitter, Evernote, Dropbox, etc. YouTube is a great way to share Extension programming (Kinsey, 2010; Parish & Karisch, 2013).
- If you favor a Tweet, have it go automatically to a Google spreadsheet, Evernote, Dropbox, or retweet it.

Have your blog post created in Blogger or WordPress go to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or other channels. Extension can use blogs to spread the word about programming and issues (Kinsey, 2010).

- Automatically tweet posts from a favorite blog. Collect tweet posts in Evernote, Diigo, or Dropbox for future reading. Blogs are powerful resources for professional development; however, Cater et al. (2013) address scheduling issues. By collecting the posts, educators and specialists can read them when convenient.
- You can save your Instagram photos to Dropbox, Flickr, Evernote, Tumblr, Google Drive, etc. You can also post them to a Facebook album, to your blog, or to Twitter.
- Keep Facebook Fan Pages fresh by automatically posting content from favorite blogs, YouTube feeds, Twitter feeds, Instagram feeds, etc. Facebook can help get the word out about events, programming, publications, etc. (Kinsey, 2010; Mains et al., 2013).

Conclusion

These examples are only the tip of the iceberg. By setting up recipes in IFTTT, you can automate countless processes that are currently taking up valuable time from your workday. Using IFTTT will save time and increase reach.

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