

Using a Blog and Social Media to Market Extension

Abstract

Extension professionals at all levels can use popular social media platforms to increase awareness of Extension. This article explores how our team of Extension professionals has used a blog in combination with Facebook on a weekly basis to better market Extension and our work. Every Extension professional can easily become part of a deliberate effort to more actively connect with stakeholders by using these tools.

Keywords: [social media](#), [technology adoption](#), [Extension marketing](#), [new audiences](#), [blog](#)

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Introduction

Technology continues to change the way we communicate, providing a variety of easy-to-use tools that can be employed to enhance our ability to inform and interact (Brinkman, Kinsey, & Henneman, 2017; Cornelisse et al., 2011; Parsons, 2015). Extension's challenge is to market the vast amounts of information we have to share and the various programs we provide. One way we can do this is by strategically using popular social media platforms to increase awareness and understanding of our efforts.

Two prevalent social media platforms are blogs and Facebook. Weblogs (now known simply as blogs) originated in the mid-1990s in response to static and often outdated web pages. As the term implies, a blog is a 'log' or journal of sorts with content that is frequently updated and formatted in reverse chronological order (Djuraskovic, 2018). Facebook, the ubiquitous social networking website, has enabled users over the age of 12 to share virtually anything with one or more other interested parties since 2006 (Nations, 2018). There were more than 1.5 billion daily Facebook users on average in September 2018 (Facebook Newsroom, 2018).

In an Extension context, we can use these tools to strengthen connections with other educators and increase both awareness and understanding of our work with clientele (Doyle & Briggeman, 2014; Gharis, Bardon, Evans, Hubbard, & Taylor, 2014; Kinsey, 2010). Since 2014, a team of Ohio State University community development Extension professionals with which we are associated has used these two tools as the foundation for enhancing connections with existing clientele and colleagues and increasing exposure to the team's work. Specifically, we

have used a weekly blog post in conjunction with Facebook to communicate information about our programming efforts and encourage interested audiences to connect to our web-based materials for more in-depth information.

Who Do We Reach?

Initially, our primary audience was Extension administrators and other Extension educators throughout the state. We wanted to help them better understand our work in the realm of community development and the community issues we aim to address. We hoped that after gaining an increased appreciation for and understanding of our work, our colleagues could more easily help others increase their knowledge on the topic of community development and connect with us when needed. Since beginning this weekly effort, our blog subscription list has grown fourfold to over 400 regular subscribers. Use of Facebook has enabled our subscribers to "share" our blog and Facebook posts with others within their individual networks, thereby expanding the reach of our weekly blog posts.

How Do We Reach Them?

Build a Team

We Extension professionals have much knowledge to share and, by our very nature, enjoy sharing it. Consequently, assembling a team for our blogging effort was easy. Preparing and disseminating weekly blog posts requires authors, editors, and content formatters. Our team, in total, has averaged about 25 members. The majority of these individuals have served as authors. One team member serves as editor. Some team members have played all three roles, but the majority focus exclusively on one.

Create a Schedule

For sake of efficiency and to avoid confusion, we assign authors to particular weeks and then share a quarterly assignment schedule with the team. An author is reminded 1 month in advance of the due date for his or her post. This 4-week notice has been helpful to authors who find themselves in need of last-minute schedule adjustments, enabling them to trade scheduled dates with others.

Think Content Library

Our posts highlight information found in greater detail on our web pages. These web pages serve as our content library, which hosts a wide variety of publications and literature, event calendars, event information, and related materials. Users also can read more about our Extension staff members and find detailed contact information. Maintaining an up-to-date content library is the responsibility of all team members.

Encourage Action

Our blog posts aim to gain the reader's attention and move them to action. Containing active links, posts direct readers to upcoming calendar events, publications, staff pages, and other in-depth resources. At such linked-to sites, the reader can register for an upcoming event or learn about a topic, such as such as leadership development, fiscal policy, or consumer economics, in greater detail. A post also may offer commentaries or reflections, exposing readers to different perspectives and potentially challenging their points of view.

Foster Diversity

Because our blog authors have been given the freedom to choose the topics of their blog posts and to use their own writing styles, the look and feel of the blog truly encompasses the diversity of their work, thoughts, and interests. In addition to the diversity of writing style, the visual content can vary widely to include author-designed tables and charts as well as stock images and photographs taken by the authors. This freedom allows authors to provide images that most effectively market their unique programs and resources.

Summary and Conclusion

To effectively connect with our collaborators and stakeholders by using social media tools requires a deliberate strategy (Robideau & Santl, 2011). Over the past several years, we have increased our use of university-supported information communication technologies to connect with existing and new audiences. Previously, we solicited from team members information about their program efforts that was then painstakingly arranged in newsletter format for quarterly distribution. Now we are connecting with an increasing number of interested readers more efficiently on a weekly basis. Use of a blog in tandem with Facebook has enabled us to more effectively connect people to our vast array of Extension resources and information. And they in turn have helped connect us with their networks, enabling us to better market Extension (Hill, 2014).

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