

Getting the Most out of Social Media: Creating a Social Media Plan¹

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Introduction

In the last five years, social media has transformed from a novel technology used by individuals to communicate to an integral part of marketing and communicating with potential customers, other individuals, and other businesses. Social media platforms can be used by individuals, organizations, and businesses to share their stories with larger audiences (Telg et al., 2018). Seven-in-ten Americans use social media to engage with news content, share information, connect with one another, and entertain themselves (Pew Research Center, 2019), steadily increasing from one-in-twenty Americans in 2005. While once thought of as a tool for younger individuals, 70% of individuals over age 50, including 40% of individuals over age 65 use at least one social media platform.

Research shows that every social media platform saw significant growth from 2013 to 2014 (Duggan et al., 2015) and use remained constant from 2016 to 2019 despite concerns of privacy, fake news, and political controversy (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 social media use increased with more people relying on the internet for news, (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021), work, and school (Anderson & Vogels, 2020). It is important to reach your audience where they are, thus social media is critical for agriculturalists and organizations working with the public, like Extension. Moreover, social

media use by agricultural businesses has proven effective in increasing sales (Yao, 2018).

This EDIS publication, which focuses on how to create a social media plan, is part of the *Getting the Most out of Social Media* publication series. Created for Florida professionals, business owners, and individuals interested in understanding how to strategically use social media, this EDIS series seeks to educate Floridians on how to develop a successful social media plan. The following sections will outline how to develop a plan to successfully adopt and maintain social media platforms for agriculturalists and Extension personnel.

Social Media Plan

Building anything from the ground up takes time, patience, and organization, but with a little guidance, adopting social media can be a fun and exciting experience for your agricultural business or organization. The following steps form the framework for your social media plan and your blueprint for success (Lee, 2014):

- 1. Choose the social media platform(s) that work for you.**
As can likely be expected, not all social media platforms are for everyone. Depending on the audience you want to reach and the kind of information you want to share, not every platform may be right for your agricultural

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business. The most widely used social media platforms today are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and blog sites but not every platform is appropriate for every individual, organization or business (Telg et al., 2019).

Therefore, when developing a social media plan and selecting platforms, keep these factors in mind:

- **Time**—*How much time can you devote to social media?* As a rule of thumb, plan at least one hour per day per platform, at least in the beginning. Once you become better acquainted with social media, there are other tools like Buffer, Sprout Social and HootSuite that allow you to manage several platforms from one, centralized location without having to go to each platform individually.
 - **Resources**—*Who will be in charge of your social media platforms and what skills do they/you have to work with?* Every platform requires different images, videos, and content to be posted and shared. Be sure to have the resources to be able to post such things. However, do not get discouraged. A picture of you or one of your workers out in the field with a short and creative description is a great place to start.
 - **Audience**—*What platform(s) does your potential target audience browse and interact on? What social media platform(s) has the right demographics for your agricultural operation?* Pew Research Center’s “[Demographics of Key Social Networking Platforms](#)” outlines information regarding the number of internet users using a particular platform (specifically Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest), as well as age, location, and occupations of such users.
2. **Fill out all profiles completely.** Making sure to have the most up-to-date information on all your social media platforms profiles is key to being successful and building relationships with your target audience. Profiles require text and photos, so remember to keep your profile pictures current as well. If you have multiple platforms, make sure your profile is consistent on each platform. While your profile on different platforms does not have to be identical, making sure these match using branding principles such as creating similar user names, using similar language to describe yourself, and designating the same location can help your followers know it is you.
3. **Find your voice and tone.** Before you start sharing, take a moment and decide what voice (personality) and tone (feeling and qualities) you want to have on your social media platform(s). Asking yourself the following questions will help you determine your voice and tone:

- If your business were a person, what kind of personality would it have?
 - If your business were a person, what would its relationship to the target audience—most likely, your consumers—be like?
 - Describe in adjectives what your business’ personality is not.
 - What do you want your followers/consumers/target audience to think about your business?
4. **Pick a posting strategy.** You may be wondering what you should post, how many times you should post per day, or what time of the day to post. Unfortunately, there is no magic answer. What to post, the frequency of posts, and the time of day to post depend largely on your target audience; however, here are a few tips for when you start:
- **What should I post?** Images are attractive to followers and can be found throughout social media. However, it’s often helpful to include a quick description with the image you post. Videos, like images, are also visually attractive to followers.
 - Also included in this conversation should be decisions about what topics are off limits. While you may be a big Florida Gators fan or political news junkie, content related to these topics may not be relevant for all your followers. Setting boundaries and being consistent with what you do and do not post about can help guide decisions on what to post.
 - **How often should I post?** This once again depends on your target audience and the feedback you receive from followers. You do not want to post so often that your posts begin to be overlooked, but you want to post often enough such that you are not forgotten about. For the most part, posting five to 10 times per week on Facebook and five times per day on Twitter is recommended.
 - **When should I post?** If you are not sitting in front of a computer or on your mobile device checking your social media accounts, let us say during the time a typical family sits down to have dinner, chances are your followers are not checking either. Try to stay away from these times, and as you begin to post, take notice of the time that your audience is responding to you.
5. **Analyze, test, and repeat.** The more you post and become active on your social media platform(s), the more you will be able to determine what works for you and your audience. Tools such as Buffer, Sprout Social, and HootSuite can help you analyze your performance and evaluate what has been successful by breaking up views,

clicks, shares, likes, and comments into information you are able to understand and interpret for the future.

6. **Engage.** The main purpose of social media is to allow you to connect and communicate with your consumers in a way that has not been possible before. Maintaining this communication and relationships is the last step in social media planning. You want to make sure you listen to your followers and others on social media so that you can stay relevant in this ever-changing world.

Summary

Adopting social media or revamping or adding a platform to what you already have can be intimidating and overwhelming; however, creating a social media plan before jumping in can help you organize your ideas and decide what is the best course of action for your business.

For more information on getting the most out of social media, be sure to check out these other publications from faculty housed in the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources:

- Getting the Most out of Social Media: What is Social Media?
- Getting the Most out of Social Media: How to Successfully Use Social Media
- Getting the Most out of Social Media: Good Practices When Using Social Media
- [Storytelling through Social Media](#) (AEC 556)
- [Story Development](#) (AEC 553)
- [Face-to-Face Storytelling](#) (AEC 555)
- Letting Them In: Sharing Your Story with People outside of Your Industry (AEC 554)

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