

Storytelling through Social Media¹

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This publication covers how to use social media to share your story. It is the fourth of a four-part series on crafting your story, *Story Development* (AEC553), *Letting Them In: Sharing Your Story with People outside of Your Industry* (AEC554), and *Face-to-Face Storytelling* (AEC555). This series focuses on both personal and organizational stories.



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Introduction

A story is only as good as its delivery. By following the best practices in this EDIS publication, you will be equipped to share your story with a larger audience using social media. As mentioned in previous EDIS documents in this series, sharing the story of your organization can improve customer relations, community engagement, and market share.

Social Media Storytelling

With technology such as smartphones, laptop computers, tablets, and wearable technology like smart watches being used more each day, telling your organization's story using online social media platforms is essential because that is where people's attention is. Social media is defined as any website or application that enables people to create and share content on an online social network. Although there are several social media platforms, some of the most widely used today are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and blog sites. Each of these social media platforms provides an opportunity to share your story with potential clients. Below are a few tips for sharing your story on each of these platforms.

YouTube

YouTube is the world's most popular video streaming website. You can easily leverage video storytelling through this platform. As mentioned in *Face-to-Face Storytelling* (AEC555), writing out your story and practicing out loud and in front of an audience will help in the delivery of your story on YouTube.

You can use the camera that you have on your mobile device or your computer's webcam to record yourself sharing your organization's stories and updates. A great way to utilize YouTube is by simply recording yourself talking into your webcam. If you look directly in the camera, when a client watches the video, it appears as if you are looking directly at them. This creates a great deal of visual interest.

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You can video record anywhere that you would like, although ideally somewhere quiet but still featuring something nice to look at behind you, such as a nice office space or a field of crops. Videos can be of any length, but usually shorter videos (less than four minutes long) will be watched in full. If your YouTube story is longer than that, consider breaking it up into varying video segments.

Video is a powerful tool that allows your audience to see you (visually) share the passion that you have for your organization. For information on how to shoot and edit a professional looking YouTube video, read the EDIS series on video production at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_video_production.

Blogs

Blogs are online journals that allow you to share your stories through text and with accompanying photos and videos. Blogs allow for longer written story content and can provide great value when you share the stories of your operation. Readers of blogs are looking for information, and if you can provide regular updates that are informative, your blog will become a resource that clients will want to seek out.

Successful blogs can be long or short, but the content needs to be substantive and interesting. Utilize the text-based format to describe in detail how you do things in your operation. You can even include pictures to help illustrate what you are referring to.

Blog posts are similar to journal entries because posts do not have to relate to one another but all need to relate to your organization. Every blog post helps share your story.

Blogs can be any length, but shorter is typically better. You can encourage readers to visit your site frequently by posting your story in segments. As was mentioned in the “Simplicity” section of *Letting Them In: Sharing Your Story with People outside of Your Industry*, avoid jargon as much as possible in your blogs in order to appeal to as wide of an audience as possible.

Twitter

Twitter is a text-based social network that allows you to post message of up to 140-character called “tweets.” Twitter is more conversational than the other social media platforms. You can tweet to provide short dispatches of what is happening in the ongoing story of your organization, write about news in your organization, and share interesting

articles that pertain to your field. These items keep your organization in the minds of users on Twitter.

A primary use of Twitter is to engage your clients and other industry contacts in a conversational context by tweeting at others in your network to ask questions, seek advice, or provide your own responses to others’ inquiries. Twitter, when used effectively, can bolster others’ view of your organization.

Because of Twitter’s 140-character limit, it is almost impossible to tell an entire story. Twitter can be used to share your organization’s likes and values through what you tweet and retweet. Twitter can be used to retweet other media, such as YouTube videos or blog posts where you have already established your story.

Facebook

Facebook allows you to share a combination of the aforementioned social media platforms. Sharing your story on Facebook is most effective when you share posts that incorporate text, images, and video and allow for engagement from current and potential clients. When you post content, people may comment, which gives you the opportunity to open dialogue with them about what you do.

In creating story content for Facebook, remember that the objective is to share your story, not necessarily to promote your organization’s products. Readers want to hear your story, not read a lot of promotional content, so keep that type of information to a minimum.

Keep your posts brief. In Facebook’s early days, many posts read like novels. Now, shorter is definitely better, and you should aim for 80–100 words per post.

As with other social media platforms, images are king on Facebook. A few lines of text and a photo or a link to a video may be all you need to help tell your story on Facebook.

Instagram

Instagram is a mobile- and photo-based social network that allows you to use photographs to tell your story. Instagram users can select any photo and use the app to apply a filter and make edits before posting, giving cell phone photographs a more professional appearance. Captions or text can also be posted with the photograph, although this social media platform is designed to let the photograph tell the story. Other users can be tagged in the photographs or mentioned in the caption text, which

is useful for promoting collaborations. A “repost” app for Instagram can also be used to allow users to repost other users’ photographs.

When telling your organization’s story, remember the old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. Think about how others may perceive the photograph differently than you and whether that would be good for you or your organization’s story. Create a theme for the photographs you share and be consistent. Be sure the photographs you post are also aesthetically pleasing, and creative and that you spread out posts to once or twice per day. Be sure to engage your followers by commenting on their photos, liking their photos, and following them. You can also use hashtags (#), for example, #johndoefarms, on Instagram to help create categories or draw attention to a particular story. Overall, with Instagram, you want followers to “see” your story come alive through photographs.

Summary

Whether you are sharing your story in person or online, sharing your story effectively is essential to your organization’s success. No matter how difficult storytelling may seem, through preparation and practice, anyone can be an expert storyteller. Utilizing all storytelling platforms—including various social media platforms—allows you to share that story with the widest possible audience.