

# How Reporters Use Social Media

By Suzanne Steel and Martha Filipic, College Communications, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, The Ohio State University

Land-grant and agency media relations professionals are turning to social media more and more to reach ever-broadening audiences. But questions remain: How do reporters make use of social media? And how can university and agency communicators best reach reporters through this approach?

With help from a 2013 ACE Professional Development Grant, we conducted in-depth interviews with nine agricultural reporters based in Ohio (two of whom work for national ag media organizations). We reviewed what they said about their own use of social media and created a survey tool we could use to gather similar information from additional reporters, from both agricultural and traditional media outlets. With help from volunteers from California, Iowa, Louisiana, Alaska, Mississippi, Ohio and Washington, D.C., we gathered 53 surveys about the use of Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and blogs, allowing us to gain some insight in how general and agricultural reporters use social media.

## Process

We interviewed nine representatives from the Brownfield Network, *Farm and Dairy* newspaper, *Feedstuffs* weekly newspaper, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, and *Ohio Farmer* magazine. These face-to-face interviews revealed a varied approach to social media and news gathering, and helped us understand how reporters were using social media on a professional basis. These interviews were instrumental in helping develop a survey that would allow us to capture information in a more reportable, consistent fashion.

An e-mail survey (attached) was sent to agricultural and mainstream media across the country by Ohio State and ACE media relations professionals. As an incentive, we offered \$10 Amazon gift certificates to ACE media relations professionals for every completed survey (Ohio State staff did not participate in this incentive).

Results from the survey were placed into a spreadsheet for comparison and analysis purposes. Reporters were promised anonymity, so while this report may categorize some according to type of media outlet, it will not identify them.

*"I hate social media. I find it unbearably narcissistic."*

*"Using social media is a great way to quickly aggregate reactions around breaking news, find new sources for stories and share content we think will resonate."*

*"Facebook is a cesspool. I find other ways to read press releases, etc., rather than go through Facebook."*

*"It's relatively new to me, but sink or swim, I'm jumping in."*

*"Would like a Twitter link on every press release so I can send that release out to my Twitter followers."*

## What we learned

As the quotes above reveal, the survey showed vastly differing opinions and approaches in reporters' use of social media.

Among reporters interviewed face-to-face, age seemed to be a determining factor. The younger journalists were more apt to be using social media for news gathering and disseminating, while the older reporters were more likely to use it only when forced to by their employer. But there was an exception to this rule. One editor who might be defined as "older" is considered an innovative leader in the use of social media, for both information gathering and story dissemination.

We did not ask the age of reporters participating in the survey, but for the most part if a media outlet was aggressive in its use of social media, so were its reporters.

Despite the wide range in approaches, our analysis did reveal some trends. For example, 81 percent of participants use Twitter and 64 percent use Facebook for professional purposes. About one fourth of each get "quite a few" story ideas from Twitter or Facebook. We were also able to capture popular Twitter hashtags and blogs, as detailed later in this report.



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## Survey Results

(not all respondents answered every question)

### 1. Do you use Twitter for professional purposes?

Yes: 43

No: 10

#### a. If yes, do you use Twitter to post about stories you've written?

Yes, almost all the time: 25

Sometimes: 10

No, hardly ever: 6

#### b. Do you get story ideas from reading posts on Twitter?

Yes, quite a few: 11

Sometimes: 23

No, hardly ever: 9

#### c. Do you find sources on Twitter?

Yes, quite a few: 8

Sometimes: 24

No, hardly ever: 10

#### d. Do you regularly follow hashtags on Twitter?

Yes: 11

No: 26

### 2. Are you on Facebook for professional purposes?

Yes: 32

No: 18

#### a. If yes, do you post about stories you've written?

Yes, almost all the time: 20

Sometimes: 12

No, hardly ever: 11

#### b. Do you get story ideas from Facebook?

Yes, quite a few: 9

Sometimes: 23

No, hardly ever: 9

#### c. Do you find sources on Facebook?

Yes, quite a few: 10

Sometimes: 24

No, hardly ever: 9

### 3. Do you read any blogs for professional purposes?

Yes: 36

No: 16

#### a. If yes, do you get story ideas from blogs?

Yes, quite a few: 7

Sometimes: 24

No, hardly ever: 5

#### b. Do you find sources from blogs?

Yes, quite a few: 5

Sometimes: 23

No, hardly ever: 10

### 4. Are you on Pinterest for professional purposes?

Yes: 6

No: 26

#### a. If yes, do you post items on Pinterest to link followers to stories you've written?

Yes, almost all the time: 1

Sometimes: 2

No, hardly ever: 9

#### b. Do you get story ideas from looking at others' Pinterest pages?

Yes, quite a few: 0

Sometimes: 2

No, hardly ever: 9

#### c. Do you find sources from Pinterest?

Yes, quite a few: 0

Sometimes: 2

No, hardly ever: 9

## Open-ended responses

We also asked respondents open-ended questions about what time of day they are normally on Twitter and Facebook. In examining their responses, we found the vast majority responded with no specific time (e.g., "Off and on throughout the day," "8-5," "It depends").

This contrasts with findings by Dan Zarrella ("The Science of Marketing," 2013) that indicates Tweets posted in late afternoon during the work week have higher re-Tweet and higher click-through rates, and that Facebook posts in the early evening tend to have more "Likes" and "Shares.")

In our survey, most Twitter and Facebook users who mentioned specific times reported several times a day (e.g., "Morning before noon, again around 5 p.m.," "11 a.m. to noon, again late afternoon," "First thing in morning, late at night"). We grouped those responses according to specific times of day (i.e., 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.; 10 a.m. to noon; noon to 3 p.m.; 3 p.m. and later in work day). We found that those respondents were most commonly on Twitter between 10 a.m.-noon and noon to 3 p.m., and on Facebook between 7 a.m. and noon.

This finding could have implications for public information officers who wish to try posting at different times of day maximize exposure for their Tweets and Facebook posts.

As part of the survey, participants shared information about hashtags, blogs, and organizational Facebook and Pinterest pages they follow.

### Hashtags reporters follow

#farm  
 #farmbill  
 #GMO  
 #cawater  
 #BDCP  
 #bakersfield  
 #cawx  
 #sacdelta  
 Only follow hashtags when there is an event like a trial or disaster I'm following  
 #fairbanks  
 #alaska  
 #agchat  
 #plant13  
 #harvest13  
 #farmbill  
 #haelex  
 #breaking  
 #mississippi  
 #jackson  
 #farming  
 #soil  
 #bobevas and other companies I cover  
 event-specific hashtags  
 #agriculture  
 #Ohio

### Pinterest pages reporters follow

AgChat Foundation  
 Use Pinterest for finding points I want to illustrate in my work blog

### Blogs reporters follow

Bovidiva.com  
 Farmpolicy.com  
 Dailyonder.com  
 Civileats.com  
 National sustainable ag coalition (can't remember name of blog)  
 Frenchfoodintheu.s.com  
 The Rural Blog  
 Coal Country  
 Aquaformia  
 Maven's Notebook  
 Edible Geo  
 Discovery blog  
 Forbes blogs  
 The Salt  
 ModFarm  
 Createquity  
 Small business Administration  
 Nonprofit associations related to business  
 Advocates for Agriculture  
 Inside Iowa State  
 Civic Skinny  
 Chronicle of Higher Education  
 IFT cropwatch  
 Farmgate  
 AgWired  
 Iowa state University ICM blog  
 AgDM blog  
 Agricultureproud.com  
 Dairycarrie.com  
 Doccamiryan.wordpress.com  
 Righteousbacon.com  
 Machinefinder  
 Jim Romenesko  
 Education week  
 Buzzworthy

**Facebook pages reporters like or follow**

United Farmers and Ranchers Alliance  
 Illinois Farm Families  
 International Federation of Agricultural Journalists  
 I (heart) climate scientists  
 Sons of Anarchy  
 National Cotton Council  
 Various University of California sites  
 NPR  
 National Geographic  
 Food & Wine  
 Food Tank  
 Modern Farmer  
 Fish and Wildlife Service  
 Army Corps of Engineers  
 CA Department of Water Resources  
 Corps of Engineers  
 Office of Emergency Preparedness  
 National Weather Service  
 LSU Ag Center  
 American Farm Bureau  
 Louisiana Association of Health Plans  
 National Association of Farm Broadcasting  
 Other TV/News Outlets  
 Local clubs  
 Fairbanks Police Department  
 Fairbanks Fire Department  
 Alaska State Troopers  
 All radio stations  
 University and community colleges  
 4-H  
 National FFA  
 National Farm Machinery Show  
 Various Farm Bureau pages  
 Machinery Pete  
 Machinefinder  
 Rotary Club  
 City Facebook page  
 Area restaurants  
 Crime page for county  
 The Clarion-Ledger  
 Mississippi institutions of higher learning  
 Mississippi Emergency Management Agency  
 Media pages – TV, radio, newspapers  
 Farm related organizations such as American Farm Bureau, Ohio Farm Bureau, Corn and soybean organizations  
 The companies I cover (Wendys, Max and Ermas, Bob Evans)  
 Ag groups, photography, shale news  
 Ohio Department of Ag, Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers, OSU Extension

**Other social media tools**

We also asked an open-ended question about other social media tools reporters use or anticipate using in the future for professional purposes. Surprisingly, the most common response (n=8) was Instagram, followed by YouTube, LinkedIn and Google+ (n=6 each) and Tumblr (n=1). Public information officers may want to check with the media they work with most often to see what new tools they are using and determine how they may be able to provide information in new ways for such efforts.

## Participating news organizations

The following news organizations took part in face-to-face interviews, the survey, or both.

Farm Progress  
 The Daily Dig blog  
 Associated Press  
 ThomsonReuters  
 DTN  
 Capital Public Radio, Sacramento  
 LA Times Metro  
 Penton.com  
 LA Times  
 Sacramento Bee  
 Fresno Bee  
 Baton Rouge Advocate  
 Baton Rouge Business Report  
 Monroe News Star  
 KTVF 11, Fairbanks  
 Fairbanks Daily News-Miner  
 Ames Tribune  
 Farm Progress  
 Statehouse News Bureau,  
 Columbus, Ohio  
 Toledo Blade  
 Cleveland Plain Dealer  
 Akron Beacon-Journal  
 Farm Journal Media  
 Delta Business Journal  
 Sun Herald, Gulfport, MS  
 The Hattiesburg American  
 Delta Democrat Times  
 Vicksburg Post  
 S. Market Bulletin  
 The Starkville Daily News  
 Clarion-Ledger  
 Chickasaw Daily Journal  
 Daily Journal  
 Ohio AgNet  
 Columbus Dispatch  
 FarmPolicy.com  
 Ohio Farmer magazine  
 Farm and Dairy newspaper  
 Brownfield Network  
 Feedstuffs  
 Ohio Farm Bureau Federation

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