



Racecar on Display at the APWA Snow Conference

Hampshire are like many other states and communities in the country, striving to manage our winter maintenance operations efficiently with safety, environmental, and economic impacts in the forefront. Thanks again to the NHPWA Scholarship committee and NHPWA Board of Directors.

Scott D. Kinmond is an elected Highway/Road Agent- Public Works Director for the Town of Moultonborough, NH. Scott was elected to office in 2009, while he was still serving as Police Chief, a position held for 11 years of his 24 year Law Enforcement Career. Scott has served nearly 20 years as an Assistant Emergency Management Director for the Towns of Moultonborough and Ossipee. Scott has operated as a private snow removal contractor for over 25 years, and has been instrumental in reducing the use of salt applications by 30%, and sand/salt application by nearly 60% on paved roadways to reduce silica's from the water sheds. Scott currently serves on the NHPWA Board of Directors, and is a life member of the NHACOP, and still serves on the Cadet Academy Training committee. Scott and his wife, Anne, have two daughters.

Public Works Departments and Social Media

The information for this article has been provided by AASHTO's "Third Annual State DOT Social Media Survey" (September 2012) and from The Bridge's "Road Commissions 'Like' Facebook" (June 2013).

This is the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' third annual survey of social media usage by state departments of transportation. Forty-one states and the District of Columbia participated in this year's survey, which this year showed an increased interest on the part of state DOTs in how to improve the effectiveness of their social media programs. In addition, the survey shows that states are on the leading edge of government agencies experimenting with newer social media tools like Pinterest and Storify, while also increasing their capabilities to serve a mobile audience that depends on wireless devices like smart phones and tablet computers for information.

"We used to be very rigid and formal in all our responses. Now, we're trying to humanize the feed. We post pictures of ourselves and answer the feed as people (saying I and we) instead of an agency (DOT says...). It has helped tremendously and we've received really good public feedback!"

— Survey Comment

OLD TOOLS, NEW TOOLS

This year's survey points to a downward trend in usage for some social media tools, and hinted at potential growth in two newer tools. Again this year, fewer states reported using podcasts—recorded audio programs that can be downloaded to a smart phone, tablet computer, or mobile music player. Just 7 state DOTs said they regularly produce a podcast. In 2010, 10 states had active podcasts.

LinkedIn also appeared to be dropping in interest for state DOTs with less than 10 reporting a LinkedIn Third Annual State DOT Social Media Survey account, a significant drop from 2011 when 19 state DOTs had some kind of LinkedIn account. Those that have accounts said those accounts were mostly used for advertising job openings and recruiting new employees.

Pinterest, one of the newest and fastest growing social media sites in the past year, is now being used by seven state DOTs. The site functions as an electronic bulletin board. Users to "pin" images, video and other social media content to virtual boards. State DOTs say

that for now they primarily are posting transportation images and videos to their boards.

Meanwhile, four state DOTs reported using Storify, a newer social media channel that allows the integration of Twitter, Facebook, video and other social feeds into a single story.

“We’re seeing a slow and steady gain in Twitter and Facebook followers. We’re seeing more and more people asking questions, sharing comments or airing concerns via these two medium.”

— Survey Comment

TWITTER, FACEBOOK, AND VIDEO

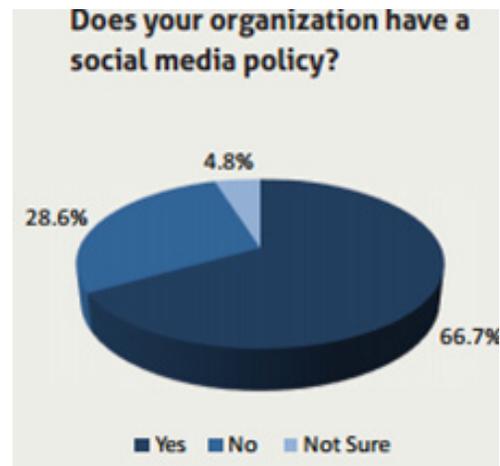
There is little doubt that Twitter remains the most used social media outreach tool for state DOTs with 88% (37 of 42) of state DOTs saying they use Twitter in some way to share information. Nearly half of respondents said their state was using Twitter differently than they did a year ago. Primarily, states report a stronger emphasis on personal messages that help build an online connection with the people who follow their Twitter accounts.

One state shared, “We’ve tried to ‘lighten’ our tweets and avoid just tweets of crashes and lane closures.” Another describes their shift this way, “Changed the traffic account to allow it to be more human. They respond much with a much more personal flavor now.”

While Twitter content is generally focused on traffic, weather and project information, state DOTs are using Facebook to explore more feature stories and human interest topics. Seventy-six percent of states (32 of 42) reported having some kind of Facebook account, a significant increase from 2010, when only 14 state DOTs had a Facebook account. Half of the state DOTs said they were shifting how they use their Facebook pages to make them more personable.

States that had automated news feeds on their Facebook pages are now manually updating the pages with project information, special events and more video and photos.

One state reports its Facebook page has become a key customer service tool. “We use Facebook for recruiting, and for featuring the more human interest side of (DOT). However, we are finding that we are getting more and more people posting questions and comments about highway projects on Facebook. So, we’re using it more and more for citizen representative/customer service type things.”



Results for the question ‘Does your organization have a social media policy?’

Another describes it this way, “We have been making an effort to keep the content fresh and to post more multimedia content. It does seem to have engaged more people.”

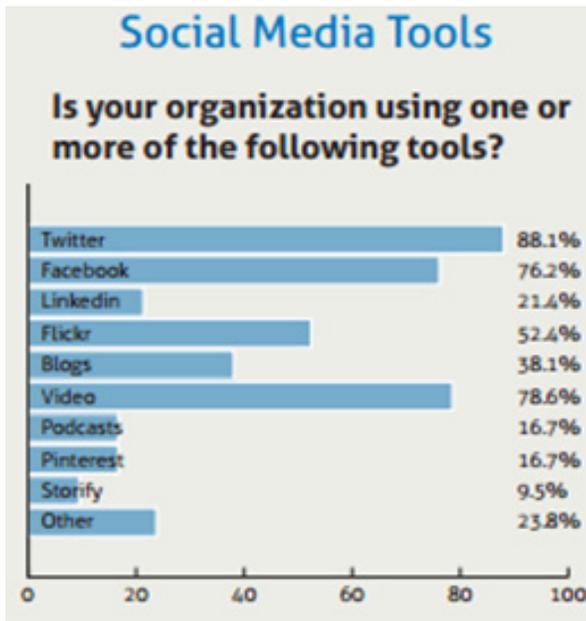
States also reported that they are using more photos and video on their Facebook pages as a way to help people understand programs and highlight special events.

Nearly 80% of state DOTs said they were using some kind of online video service (YouTube, Vimeo or similar site), with 40% saying their usage had changed in the past year. While some states said tools they had reduced their video capabilities, several states said they had increased their emphasis on video.

The state DOTs report using video to communicate more with employees, as well as the public. The videos are shorter and attempt show another side of transportation operations and projects. One state DOT said, “Have done many more personal interviews with the guys on the road, learning the challenges they deal with as they do their job.” And another state DOT said, “We’ve started using video to highlight all of the great things (DOT) is doing. We also use it for project updates.”

“We are producing and editing our own videos, such as ribbon cuttings, employee events, highway dedications, press conferences and etc. We are making available to the media (once approved by the Director) events and press conference information that the media may be interested in. We shoot the video and edit and once approved upload it for the media.”

— Survey Comment



Results to the question 'Is your organization using one or more of the following tools?'

MOBILE MEDIA FOR A MOBILE AUDIENCE

States seemingly recognize their audience is increasingly on the move. The proliferation of smart phones, tablet computers, and other wireless internet-capable devices is among the reasons more states are looking to make their information more accessible to mobile devices. Sixty-two percent of state DOTs said their information is available in mobile-friendly formats. Nearly a third of states offer some kind of mobile device “app,” either for Apple devices or Android devices or both. However, 38% of state DOTs offer content that is optimized for mobile web browsers. Mostly the mobile information—in the apps and in the mobile web format—is aimed at travelers, offering access to traffic information and 5-1-1 systems.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

State DOTs overwhelmingly agreed (69%) that they anticipate challenges for their social media programs. Primary among those challenges is the pressure put on communication teams to shift their focus toward more social media outreach while still maintaining traditional outreach efforts.

Time was a noted concern for several of the respondents, as well as ensuring they had access to employees with the right skill set to manage and work in social media programs. One state said they were concerned about “too many (social media) to handle effectively.”

Another state DOT described it this way: “Already we are spread kind of thin, so I anticipate we will have to make a choice at some point: either we shrink our social media presence and focus on the most successful/useful tools, or we hire someone to manage all of them full-time. Not sure our current approach is sustainable long-term, at least not effectively.”

Thirty state DOTs reported there had been a shift or re-distribution of responsibilities in the last year due to social media. Several state DOTs said their existing staff were given the added responsibilities of managing one or more social media tool. In one case, the organization’s web coordinator position was changed to an “interactive” communications manager responsible for social media as well as the web site.

With limited resources and growing responsibilities, state DOTs are putting a greater emphasis on measuring their social media efforts. Nearly 70% of respondents said they used some kind of analytics or measurement tools. And, from their analysis, state DOTs reported their audiences are steadily increasing and their levels of interaction are growing.

Measurement was identified by several state DOTs as a challenge in the coming year as way of knowing more about their audience. “We always need to be smarter about our content. We need to figure out how to engage our audience better,” said one state DOT.

And that emphasis on the end user—an emphasis expressed by several state DOTs—has raised the profile for social media tools within state DOTs. One state DOT described that awareness this way, “Now that people see social media is here to stay, everybody wants to use it and they want their own page. I spend a lot of time trying to sift through valid proposals versus someone wanting a new FB page because it’s ‘cool.’”

“A year ago, we did have someone dedicated to social media, but in the course of “right-sizing” our entire organization, we have had to spread those duties among several people, and are considering what role out-sourcing could play for us in the future.”

— Survey Comment

FORMULATING A POLICY

With any social media platform, it is very important and helpful to have a policy regarding responses to comments from posts on the respective page. The following article illustrates the differences in

approach to social media by two road commissions in Michigan.

CONFIGURATION

Among Michigan road commissions with Facebook pages, Van Buren (941 Likes since September 2009) and Grand Traverse (1,324 Likes since May 2010) are two of the most active and well-established. However, they take different approaches in allowing the general public to post on their page.

Van Buren CRC's Facebook page is set up to allow any user to create a new post. This configuration encourages the public to become more involved on the page. "Conversations must be two-sided to be worth-to a Facebook page does little to quell distracting posts, since a user with an axe to grind with the road commission may post in the "Recommendations" section of the Facebook page.



A sample of Exeter's Public Works Department's Facebook page

POLICY

Another area where Grand Traverse and Van Buren differ is in official written policies. Grand Traverse CRC has a formal written policy governing their Facebook page, whereas Van Buren CRC puts much of the responsibility for the page in the judgment of the moderator. In the case of Grand Traverse CRC, configuration of the Facebook page regarding user comments is board policy, and not in the hands of the moderator. The board for Grand Traverse CRC also drafted a document that specifically establishes guidelines for using social media. The guidelines include the goal of social media utilization; rules for what posts are considered appropriate; duties of the page's moderator;

and other details. Anyone within the road commission can read the document to understand the overall goals and protocol of the Facebook page. (Grand Traverse CRC's social media policy is available at www.michiganlantap.org./bridge_27-1).

Van Buren CRC does not have a specific written policy, but rather places much of the decision-making in the hands of their Facebook moderator. Rader's directive from her supervisor is to "respectfully educate" public audiences. Explaining how she responds to posts, she said, "If they are an easy fix, a misconception or issue, I handle it myself, but if it's a more difficult or hostile post, I'll draft the response and share it with my superiors for approval." This ensures that the moderator is free to use their judgment in dealing with common posts, and that responses to difficult topics are collectively decided upon.



A sample of Keene's Public Works Department's Facebook page