

Social media communications plan

Outline of technologies and methods used by Organizational Advancement.

Scope of plan

This document is intended to be a “living document” — it evolves and changes as the technologies and methods of social media do. [Iowa State University \(ISU\) Extension and Outreach](#) utilizes a variety of channels and platforms of social media and monitors new technologies, adopting those that fit our communications needs best. While there are numerous social media platforms available, this plan only addresses those actively in use.

Overview

Social media continues to be a major focus and growing component of the Web, with more users signing up every day for websites and applications as new platforms are developed. Social media presents an opportunity for additional channels through which ISU Extension and Outreach can reach stakeholders with promotion of news, publications, programs and other resources. In addition to disseminating information, social media offers the opportunity to engage with stakeholders and form online communities around ISU Extension and Outreach. However, social media is not all-inclusive and needs to be part of a larger communications effort.



Extension and Outreach currently uses several social media channels as means to spread ISU Extension and Outreach news, as well as post unique content, reinforce the brand and engage with stakeholders. Content is chosen based on audience and relevance, using each channel's unique strengths to best present the information.

Guiding principles

To ensure that our stakeholders get the most out of their social media experience with ISU Extension and Outreach, Organizational Advancement staff is constantly monitoring best practices of social media use and experimenting with content types that work best with each channel.

In general, activity by ISU Extension and Outreach on all its social media platforms is focused on:

- being **authentic and positive**
- being used to **listen** to fans/followers
- **responding** to comments and questions
- **conversing** naturally with fans/followers
- providing content that is focused on **quality over quantity**

The ISU Extension and Outreach accounts already have a solid group of followers and continue to increase in followers and gain new audiences with increases in activity and changes in tactics.

General tactics

Organizational Advancement posts content from all program areas through its social media efforts, choosing news items, links, videos, photos and other resources on an as-needed basis. The goal is not to post a large quantity of content, but to choose quality content that would be of interest to the audience, and that either strengthens the image or recognition of the brand or has some form of follow up for readers, such as a program they can participate in or information they can use in their lives.

It is recommended that program specialists work with Organizational Advancement staff to identify suitable content and topics for use with the main ISU Extension and Outreach social media accounts, as opposed to working through separate accounts. Organizational Advancement staff monitors Extension-related sites for content and also accepts submissions of content for review and posting.

On Facebook, any user connected to the ISU Extension and Outreach page can post news, information, links, photos and videos to the page's wall. Posts made show up with the user's name.

ISU Extension and Outreach pages also have a consistent personality. It is excited and enthusiastic. Helpful and friendly. Personal and engaging. Professional and reliable. These are all traits stakeholders should see in the online, social personality of ISU Extension and Outreach. One main content stream allows for a consistent ISU Extension and Outreach personality, strengthening the personal connect with stakeholders.

Note: Organizational Advancement strongly suggests that ISU Extension and Outreach Facebook pages should have an Organizational Advancement staff member set as an administrator in case of changes in staff. This also allows Organizational Advancement staff to check page usage for reporting, as well as suggest features that may benefit the page.

Overview

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform in which users can quickly and easily send 140-character updates; link to photos, videos or stories; and reply to other accounts. Twitter is ideal for engaging with users in real time and keeping a consistent stream of content flowing to interested parties. Due to the ease-of-use sharing capabilities, Twitter is also beneficial for spreading news to an audience.



Organizational Advancement usage

Extension is currently using multiple Twitter accounts, most of which push out news and information through an automated system (like [@ISUExtNews](#), which posts all Extension and Outreach releases). Some accounts are not set up with automatic posts and are being used as an engagement tool.

Audience

The audience of the [@ISUExtension](#) account (the only account manually posted to by the Organizational Advancement team) includes followers mostly from the agriculture and food communities. Additional followers include statewide media and other state extension systems. The audience is continually monitored for changes and active followers. We are also continually looking to expand our audience and attract diverse followers with diverse interests.

Tactics

Through posting and tone, the account is given a personality, or voice, so followers know a person is behind the account and can be engaged.

- *Engage followers:* Effort is made to quickly answer questions and provide direction to resources, as well as actively “talk” with followers and provide feedback, comments or general conversation.
- *Brand cross-promotion:* Special attention is paid to retweet news and comments from other ISU accounts, such as [@ISU_AgDM](#) or [@IowaStateUNews](#), to strengthen brand focus.
- *Highlight news/activities/events:* Share information and links for upcoming events and activities or news related to the audience, both statewide and regional.
- *Retweeting/link sharing:* Links and updates of followers are retweeted and shared. This helps keep the account active, and builds relationships and brand recognition with followers.
- *Push media mentions:* As ISU Extension staff and experts are used as media sources, links to stories are shared to promote the brand in third-party outlets. ISU Extension also uses Google Alerts to find mentions of Extension personnel and programs in state and regional outlets and then promotes them.
- *Follow trends:* Using Twitter is an excellent way to follow trends and topical conversations to help guide content and news resources. Use searches and hashtags to find relevant posts.
- *Be positive and smart:* Here is an excellent rule of thumb for using Twitter. Imagine your mother reading what you post online. Would she be proud of what you were saying in a public forum or embarrassed? If it's the latter, you probably shouldn't be posting it. Be smart.

Facebook

www.facebook.com

Overview

Facebook is a social networking website which allows users to become “fans” of pages and follow the page’s activity, share the page’s content and interact by commenting on the posts. Pages can be set up by businesses or organizations and used to post news, events, links, photos and video. Pages offer some custom usability as well.



Organizational Advancement usage

The Organizational Advancement team maintains a single Facebook page for [ISU Extension and Outreach](#). Other extension-related pages are maintained by other teams (such as [Spend Smart, Eat Smart](#).) The ISU Extension and Outreach page has multiple administrators who work together to post all the content and utilize features which can also include custom tabs. The page is used to share news, events, links, photos and videos from both county sites and extension-related pages that highlight past, current and future items, as well as a look at the ISU Extension and Outreach organization, such as the people and activities behind it.

Audience

The audience on the Facebook page consists of ISU Extension and Outreach staff, ISU staff, ISU students and extension stakeholders (67 percent female, and more than 50 percent in the 25-to-44-year-old age range).

Tactics

One goal of Organizational Advancement is to give ISU Extension and Outreach a voice or personality through the use of Facebook, offering a way for users to engage and talk back to ISU Extension and Outreach. The Facebook page is also used to showcase a “behind-the-scenes” look at ISU Extension and Outreach, including videos and photos of activities and events. Audience-relevant news and information is also posted or shared.

- *Engage followers:* Effort is made to quickly answer questions and provide direction to resources, as well as actively “talk” with fans and provide feedback, comments or general conversation.
- *Photo/video posting:* Facebook is a media-rich site, and as such, Organizational Advancement makes use of the various video- and photo-sharing abilities on the ISU Extension and Outreach page. Videos and photos shared are either uploaded and unique to the Facebook page or linked from other sites, such as ISU Extension and Outreach’s YouTube channel.
- *Highlight news/activities/events:* Share information and links for upcoming events and activities or news related to the audience, both statewide and regional, as well as share information during or after events, like a 4-H photo booth promotion connected with the Iowa State Fair.
- *Push media mentions:* As ISU Extension and Outreach staff and experts are used as media sources, links to stories are shared to promote the brand in third party outlets.
- *Promote educational materials:* Relevant Extension Online Store items are promoted and linked to, usually timed to tie to an event, news, etc. Organizational Advancement works with the Extension Distribution Center to promote popular and relevant products through social media.

- *Highlight trends/topics:* Portions of hot topics that are relevant to the audience are promoted and shared, linking to resources and news.
- *Brand cross-promotion:* Special attention is paid to share news and resources from other Iowa State University and ISU Extension and Outreach accounts to strengthen the focus on other departments.
- *Community page interaction:* As community pages relevant to ISU Extension are identified, attention is paid to using keywords that pushes the content out to those community pages.
- *Be positive and smart:* Here is an excellent rule of thumb for using Facebook. Imagine your mother reading what you post online. Would she be proud of what you were saying in a public forum or embarrassed? If it's the latter, you probably shouldn't be posting it. Be smart.

Overview

YouTube is one of the top video sharing websites. The site allows a person to upload videos that can be viewed, commented on and rated on the site itself, or embedded to other websites.

Organizational Advancement Usage

Organizational Advancement utilizes YouTube for video sharing. The ISU Extension and Outreach YouTube channel is used primarily as a video hosting site, as video is embedded as content on ISU Extension and Outreach webpages or shared through other means. Extension and Outreach also uses the UKnow channel as a portal for informational videos.

Organizational Advancement uses YouTube as a convenient way to promote videos to Facebook or Twitter and spotlight new or key videos. Users can also subscribe to the channels and receive the latest Extension videos.

It is designed for external communication and videos which advance ISU Extension and Outreach, not internal or training videos.

Extension faculty and staff can submit content to Organizational Advancement communication specialists who can determine whether the content is appropriate to share on the Organizational Advancement page.



Audience

There is not a specific targeted audience on the video-hosting sites. All ISU Extension and Outreach videos are housed here for all program areas and audiences. Interested users can also subscribe to the channels to receive alerts on the latest videos as they are posted.

Tactics

Note: Not all videos are uploaded to the ISU Extension YouTube account. Some videos, such as an event behind-the-scenes video, may be uploaded and promoted on just Facebook or Instagram, depending on the goals for the video.

Overview

Blogs are a great resource to provide a continuous stream of information, often information not delivered via news release or other means and typically focused on a niche topic. Blogs are more conversational and stream-of-conscious, frequently linking to other sources and incorporating photos, video, charts and other visuals. Blogs enable readers to comment on individual posts and engage in conversation.



Organizational Advancement usage

ISU Extension maintains a [portal site](#) which has several active blogs focused on niche topics. The blogs are authored by extension program specialists within a particular topical area and not Organizational Advancement staff. However, Organizational Advancement staff does help with promoting the blogs though other social media outlets. If a specialist has a blog they would like added to the list, they may contact Organizational Advancement staff and request inclusion on the site. The blogs include:

- [See You There - VP of Extension and Outreach Cathann Kress](#)
- [Spend Smart. Eat Smart.](#)
- [AnswerLine](#)
- [Science of Parenting](#)
- [Let's Talk... Childcare](#)
- [SafeFood](#)
- [Land Use and Zoning](#)
- [Ag Decision Maker](#)

Other blogs may be and are hosted, written and maintained on other ISU Extension and Outreach-related websites.

Audience

Each blog's audience will depend on the topical area, but also the promotional strategies. Through linking on other social media sites and incoming traffic from other blogs and websites, the potential audience for a blog can quickly expand. Cross-promotion is suggested.

Tactics

Blogs can be great way to push out information, but also to expose the ISU Extension and Outreach brand. Proper blogging techniques can help gain and keep readers.

- **Consistent updates:** To keep readers actively checking the blog, it needs to stay updated and consistent. A minimum of 1 to 2 postings per week is preferred, with more as needed. Having a set schedule for posting can also help (such as Monday, Wednesday, Friday), as readers know when to expect new content and will start to visit on those days for the latest post.
- **Timely and useful topics:** Keep posts relevant and timely. If commenting on a hot topic, do so in a timely fashion, as interest may wane. Timeless topics are good as well, as is any useful information that readers can directly benefit from and share with others.
- **Be responsive:** One major feature of almost every blog is the ability for readers to comment on posts. Be responsive to these comments and show readers that they are being heard by commenting, answering questions and following up on requests.
- **Keep writing short:** Ideally, blogs are not a long form of writing and posts should be quick and to-the-point, as well as contain other useful multimedia such as photos and embedded video to grab readers' attention and keep them reading

Overview

Instagram is one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in the current marketplace and highly youth-friendly. 90 percent of its 150 million users are under the age of 35. It is a platform which can stand on its own but is also highly complementary. It can be used to enhance Facebook and Twitter. Its main usage is for photos, but it can also be used to distribute videos of up to 15 seconds in length.



Extension and Outreach Usage

Extension and Outreach has launched one Instagram account ([@ISUExtension](#)). It is designed to push photos and video from Extension personnel and events to a different audience – photos and video from county Extension offices can be repurposed for this usage.

Audience

The audience of the [@ISUExtension](#) account (the only account manually posted to by the Organizational Advancement team) will include followers mostly from the agriculture and food communities, and is expected to attract statewide media and other state extension services. The audience is continually monitored for changes and active followers, and we are working to expand and diversify our following.

Tactics

Through posting and tone, the account is given a personality, or voice, so followers know a person is behind the account and can be engaged.

- *Engage followers:* Effort is made to quickly answer questions in the comment section below posts and provide direction to resources, as well as actively “talk” with followers and provide feedback, comments or general conversation.
- *Be unique:* There are multiple ways to promote photos online via social media, including Facebook and Twitter, but special effort is given to highlight photos through the ISU Instagram account which are unique and highlight ISU Extension and Outreach’s mission in an eye-catching fashion. These photos can be used exclusively for Instagram or shared with other networks easily.
- *Brand cross-promotion:* An effort is given to promote other ISU Instagram accounts and engage with them actively, including Iowa 4-H and others, to promote their accounts and build a sense of community.
- *Highlight news/activities/events:* Share information and links for upcoming events and activities or news related to the audience, both statewide and regional, promoting with photos and videos.
- *Retweeting/link sharing:* Photos of followers are shared, or “regrammed.” This helps keep the account active, and builds relationships and brand recognition with followers.
- *Be positive and smart:* Instagram can attract a younger audience which engages heavily with its content. This can lead to emotional responses in its comment sections. Be mindful of this and be watchful of the conversations that take place. Always be smart, positive and thoughtful with the photos and videos that are posted. If you think a piece of media might be objectionable, just don’t post it.

Overview

Pinterest is a website which has been described as a “visual discovery tool” where users can save ideas for projects and interests with virtual bookmarks called “pins”. With the pins, they can plan trips, save recipes and much more. Users personalize their experience by using multiple boards and categorizing their interests: they are also able to “re-pin” others’ content to their board with a click of a button, sharing it for other users. According to a 2014 MediaBistro report, Pinterest has over 70 million active users, which are 68 percent female.



Extension and Outreach Usage

Extension and Outreach has launched one Pinterest account (www.pinterest.com/isuextension). With 13 “boards” covering a variety of subjects, it is designed to push ISU Extension and Outreach content in a variety of visually appealing ways ranging from recipes and health and nutrition to gardening and household issues, and more.

Audience

The audience of this account (the only account manually posted to by the Organizational Advancement team) will include followers who are interested in home and family life, health and nutrition, self-help and do-it-yourself projects as well as the world around them. They are primarily female so content should be aimed with that demographic in mind, although we are always working to increase and diversify our following.

Tactics

Through posting and tone, the account is given a personality, or voice, so followers know a person is behind the account and can be engaged.

- *Engage followers:* Effort is made to quickly answer questions in the comment section below posts and provide direction to resources, as well as actively “talk” with followers and provide feedback, comments or general conversation.
- *Be unique:* Effort is also given to promote ISU Extension and Outreach’s unique content and spreading its message while building the Extension and Outreach brand with timely and worthwhile posting of pins.
- *Brand cross-promotion:* An effort is given to promote other ISU Pinterest accounts and share ISU content through boards like “Iowa State University” and “Cyclone Spirit.”
- *Highlight news/activities/events:* Share information and links for upcoming events and activities or news related to the audience, both statewide and regional as well as important Extension news that is relevant to the audience.
- *Retweeting/link sharing:* Pins are “repinned” to the ISU Extension board but only if they meet Extension standards and fit with its mission and priorities, particularly in health and nutrition.
- *Be positive and smart:* Always be smart, positive and thoughtful with the materials that are posted. If you think a piece of media might be objectionable, just don’t post it.