



The Social Media Guide for Law Enforcement

by **TIM BURROWS**

About The Author

Tim Burrows was a sworn police officer for 25 years working in front line operations, primary response, traffic, detective operations and media relations, retiring as a front line supervisor.

Tim now provides training and consultation for law enforcement in the use of social and digital media, communications and media relations through his agency, Twelve Sixty Six.

He is the creator and host of The Police Podcast and creator / producer of The #LESM Conference; the first fully online training conference for law enforcement social media professionals. Tim is a regular presenter and featured blogger for the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

For more information visit Tim's [site here](#).



The Social Media Guide for Law Enforcement

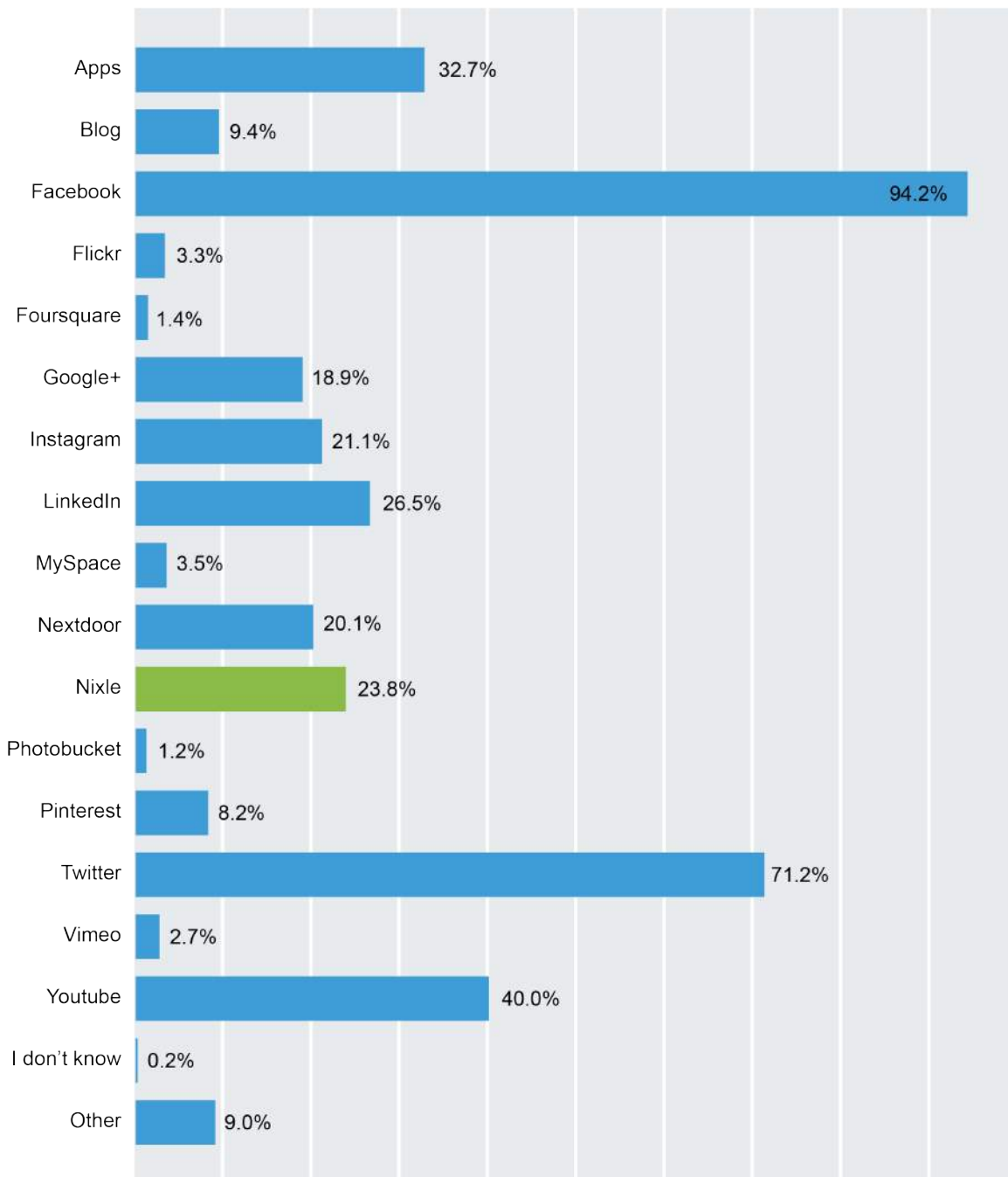
Table Of Contents

- Introduction
- Why you need social media
- Information you should be sharing
- Messaging best practices
- Event management through social media
- Get ahead of Media Reports
- Department Branding
- Conclusion

Introduction

Social media has become increasingly popular across the world while also turning into a trusted source to get the latest news and information. Law enforcement agencies are recognizing this trend and have incorporated social media strategies into their daily operations. **According to a 2015 survey conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), 96.4% of agencies surveyed used social media.**

What social media tools does your agency currently use?



Getting started with social media can be challenging, especially if one is unfamiliar with the various platforms available. For an agency to successfully leverage social media for community outreach they must first learn how to best utilize it to fit their community. In this guide, you will learn about several topics that will help you to use social media to its full potential such as:

- Best Practices for Posting a Message
- What Types of Information should be Shared through Social Media
- Event Management with Social Media
- Information Control
- Establishing a Department Brand using Social Media

Why you need social media

At one time, social media was considered an optional tool in the law enforcement toolbox for community engagement and outreach. Now, agencies that are choosing not to utilize the various social media platforms and tools for digital communication are ignoring the opportunities to build relationships, increase community trust and communicate effectively in a medium that allows for true engagement to take place.

Whether your agency is small, large or somewhere in between, your community is using social media. There is a good chance that you or issues important to you are being talked about in the social space. According to the chart on this page, 74% of all Internet users access social media networking sites. Make sure you are part of the conversation so you can leverage valuable information, dispel rumors or help develop relationships.

Who uses social networking sites

% of internet users within each group who use social networking sites

All internet users	74%
a Men	72
b Women	76
a 18-29	89 ^{cd}
b 30-49	82 ^{cd}
c 50-64	65 ^d
d 65+	49
a High school grad or less	72
b Some college	78
c College+	73
a Less than \$30,000/yr	79
b \$30,000-\$49,999	73
c \$50,000-\$74,999	70
d \$75,000+	78

Pew Research Center's Internet Project January Omnibus Survey, January 23-26, 2014.
Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., ^a) indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter, among categories of each demographic characteristic (e.g., age).

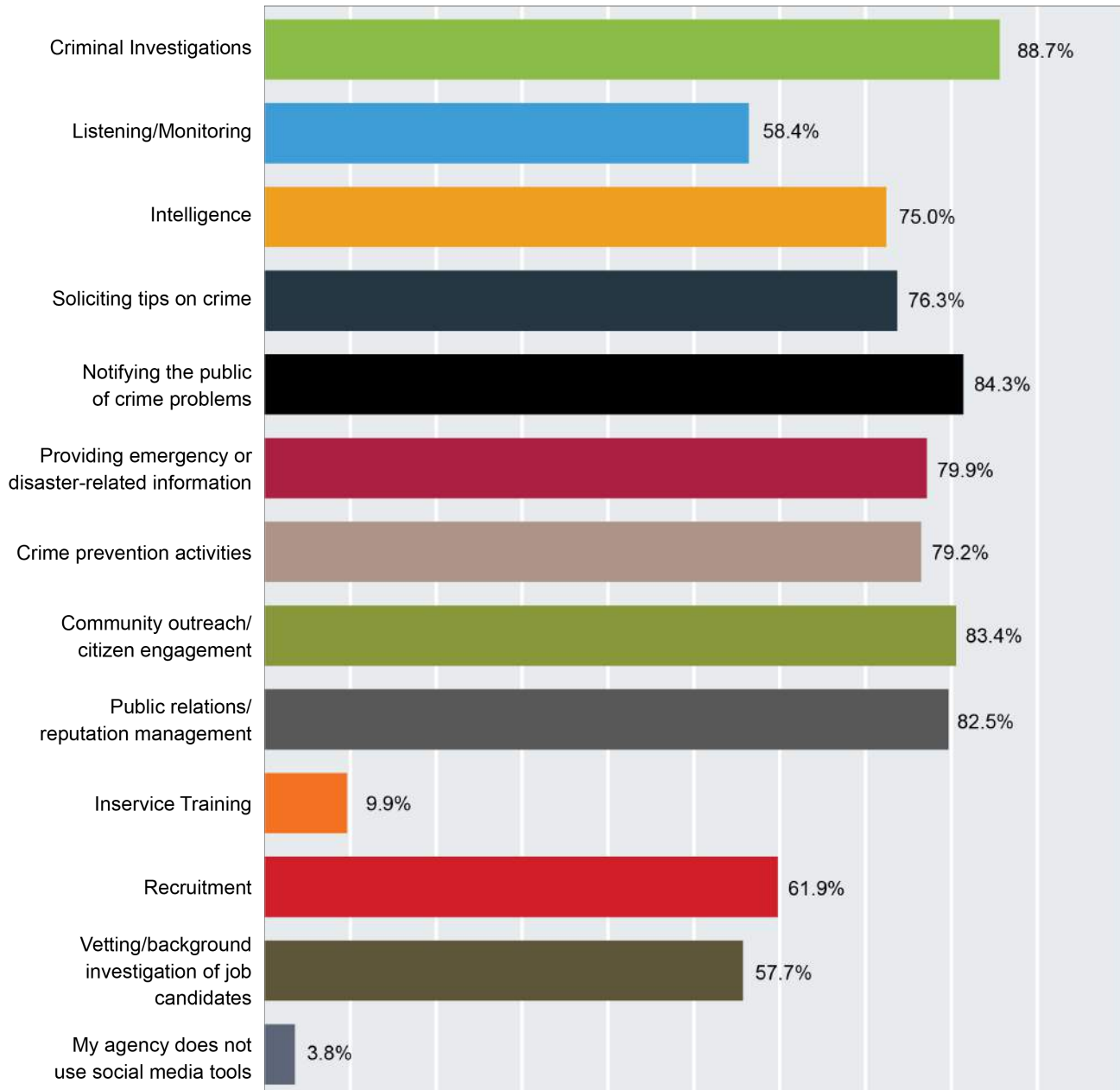
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Information you should be sharing

Message content: Social media posts should reflect what you consider to be priorities in your communication plans and follow the model of what you believe is information your community should be provided.

INFORMATION TO POST	TIPS FOR POSTING
1) Public Safety Issues 2) Occurred Crime 3) Crime Prevention 4) Wanted Persons 5) Requests For Assistance 6) Community Event 7) Public Safety Preparedness	1) Platform Specific 2) Concise 3) Honest 4) Transparent 5) Timely 6) Relevant 7) OF VALUE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

Tone: Don't talk like law enforcement, speak in plain language. Allow your voice to come through in conversations and posts. We all have personalities that we write, speak and think in so allow those personalities to come through. Your tone will always temper your voice. Your tone must always remain professional even if you are using humor.



As seen in the table above from the 2015 IACP survey on social media, public safety agencies leverage social media for a variety of use cases – the most frequent use is for criminal investigations. Social media allows law enforcement to collaborate with residents in order to gather more information about local crimes. Information about a wanted suspect can easily be shared through different channels to reach a larger audience. Additionally, sites like Facebook or Twitter can even be leveraged to share crime prevention information to residents such as tips on how to stay safe or where residents can anonymously report crimes they see happening. Non-critical information regarding community events such as town hall meetings, fundraisers or parades can also be posted on these sites and shared between residents.

Messaging Best Practices

Prior to sending messages regarding any event – whether a mundane traffic detour or something more severe like flood warnings – there are various factors to consider. Some of those factors include who you are targeting with your message, when you are sending it relative to the actual event, why you are sending it and the type of event. It is important to be prudent with each factor so your message is as effective as possible

The first step law enforcement should consider prior to posting to social media is the type of event they're looking share. Not all events are appropriate for social media and every audience. Additionally, even those that are appropriate should be handled with care. Depending on the event or incident, provide recipients with the desired actions you'd like them to take – why you're sending the message (i.e. missing person: provide residents descriptive information on the person, solicit feedback and updates if anyone sees the missing person to expedite the search). In the case of a missing person or other critical events that are time sensitive, make sure those message are delivered and shared quickly. For events or incidents that aren't emergencies, consider the timing. A community event, such as "Coffee with a Cop" should be delivered at optimal social media viewing times (primarily during the day) rather than in the middle of the night. This increases the chances it will be viewed by your intended audience and help ensure you do not annoy anyone.

Next, decide who will be the primary audience – who you're talking to. When posting to social media, a message is available to everyone, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't cater your message to the targeted recipient. Include specifics that affect them. This will help increase the impact of the message more so than a generic notice, ensuring it elicits the response you are looking for.

The 3 W's of Messaging

What?	Event Type	What is the urgency of the message?
Who?	Audience	Cater messages to target recipients
When?	Timing	Post messages during optimal social media viewing times.

Event Management through Social Media

Following a #hashtag can provide valuable information such as event locations, sentiment of community, and volume of conversation around the event

Hashtags (#) are a great tool to:

Follow conversations

Identify topics

Express emotions

Placing the hashtag immediately in front of a word creates a clickable link that is searchable.

Get ahead of Media Reports

Information is Knowledge

Creating a strategy to monitor and manage your presence on social media can have many benefits for your agency and your community.

Reputation Management

You can stay ahead of stories that become events, which can turn into issues that left unchecked can turn into a crisis situation. By taking control of information before it hits the media you can maintain your department's reputation within your community. You can incorporate your own voice into the story, lead and even influence the narrative of the story before the public or media have an opportunity to implant their opinions or thoughts. If you pay close attention to the information and issues as they are developing you can correct rumors, provide facts and re-direct information to the most trusted source...YOU. You will condition your community and your media to turn to your agency first to get the facts. This can foster the creation of good will ambassadors who will defend you as well. Social media allows you to have a constant eye on your reputation and media presence and give you a quick way to correct any misinformation.

Department Branding

Be 'in the know'

Monitor your social presence by knowing what people are saying about you, your agency and your community. This includes your media. Keep your ear to the ground. Manage your reputation by using tools to assist you in monitoring your social presence.

Mentor your community by always being transparent, honest and authentic in your response to criticism, critique and comment.

Tools To Help:

- Google Alerts
- Social Mentions
- Hashtags
- Notifications

PRO TIP: Create a hashtag identifying your agency and use it in your posts

Conclusion

Social media is a key component of community engagement for law enforcement. It provides a quick method of communication between residents and members of law enforcement and allows for custom department branding. Social media lets agencies establish a voice and address issues before they reaches the media. It is important to post relevant content often and understand when is the right time to post a message before, during an after an event. This guide is a starting point to develop a social media strategy that fits the needs of your department and residents.

About Nixle Community Engagement, by Everbridge

Engaged and active communities are built on a commitment to transparency and safety. Our Community Engagement application helps public safety and emergency management agencies to easily create a resident opt-in database, while providing you with control over authoring and publishing your message directly to the public.

Community Engagement enables:

- **Easy Resident Opt-in:** Easily increase resident opt-in's at an exponential rate. Maintain a robust database of resident contact information to foster a community dialogue or provide effective emergency notifications.
- **A Force Multiplier:** Publish and distribute public information at scale, with the push of one button, via social media, websites, email, text, **OneBridge** mobile app, and Google Alerts. Leverage residents to act as force multiplier to assist in preventing and solving crime. Ideal when internal resources are limited.
- **Control Public Information Dissemination:** Maintain complete power and control to author messages and disseminate information to the public at will.
- **Precise Neighborhood Targeting:** The most precise neighborhood-level geographic targeting system available. Send messages to specific communities or neighborhoods.
- **Focus on Public Safety:** The most trusted public safety product on the market, as used by over 8,000 public safety agencies. Completely focused on helping agencies keep residents safe and informed.