



NRPA's mission is to advance parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people.

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Using Social Media Marketing to Promote Physical Activity and Health and Wellness in Parks

INTRODUCTION

There's no longer any question about the validity of using social media today to communicate with consumers of all ages and demographics. While some audience segments may make less use of social media, the vast majority are using some form of it. The most important question now is how park and recreation organizations can make efficient use of social media to promote programs, services, facilities and events that encourage physical activity and overall health and wellness.

Historically, e-mail has been the primary tool for digital communication. And while email marketing is still a valid communications tool, there are now literally hundreds of social media platforms in existence. While there are only a handful of them that attract most of the online activity, it's a good bet that in another few years, the ones that are the most popular today will not be the same over time.



SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS: IMPRESSIVE BY THE NUMBERS

Let's start with some statistics that demonstrate the power of social media...(and the numbers are growing daily).

- 1 in 5 minutes online is spent on social networking sites
- There are more than 800 million Facebook users
- Twitter has over 100 million active users
- There were 6,939 tweets per second on New Year's Day
- There are more than 135 million professionals on LinkedIn
- Over 3 billion videos are viewed on YouTube everyday.



SOCIAL MARKETING TRENDS FOR P&R AGENCIES

Social marketing is a way of communicating with various audiences in newer, quicker and more creative ways. It's also a more efficient way to build communities of interested, vested and dedicated people that share interest in parks and recreation. Radio, TV, direct mail, outdoor advertising, newsletters, newspapers and magazines... all have been the mainstay of the ways we've historically marketed and communicated with audiences. Social media has not only been added to the list, it has replaced the list! The following social media trends are recommended to assist in promoting park and recreation programs and activities:

1. Daily Deal Coupon for Activities and Memberships

Daily deal online coupons are usually associated with the promotion of commodities rather than activities and while online coupons are not a new idea, in the last few years we've literally seen an explosion of group-based discounts or daily deal services. The two most popular are Groupon and LivingSocial. These similar services offer successful sites with daily time-sensitive discounts, which become active when a certain number of coupon purchases are reached. Online coupons are an effective way to attract new participants, fill programs and boost registration.

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2. Managing Your Online Reputation

The Internet is a virtual universe where people talk about everything. Through blogs and social media, each and every person has a voice and the reality is, people are on the web talking about your community organization; mostly good stuff, but maybe some bad stuff. Here are three ways to find out what is being said about your organization:

■ Google Alerts

Google Alerts are email updates that show the latest Google results for the keyword that you choose to track. Results can be filtered by type of media – news, blogs, videos, web, books, etc. Setting up an account with Google is optional.

■ Twitter Saved Searches

Lots of discussion takes place on Twitter. To monitor what Tweeters are saying about your community organization, enter your name in the search bar at the top of Twitter. That will pull up results of any tweet that has mentioned your name. A Twitter account is required.

■ Social Mention

Socialmention.com says it best: “Like Google Alerts but for social media.” You can use Social Mention to track discussions about your organization through many social networks. No account is necessary.

3. Location-Based Marketing: The Right Fit for P&R

Location-Based Marketing is defined by the Location-Based Marketing Guru as: “a social media marketing strategy focusing on location-based mobile check-in services, like foursquare or Gowalla, to bring deals, promotions, coupons, discounts, or specials to customers in real time on their mobile devices.”

The Location-Based marketing platforms include foursquare, Yelp, Gowalla and SCVNGR and others, and are mostly available on smart phones allowing users to “check in” to a physical location such as a park, recreation area, restaurant, golf course, concert hall, etc. Some of these services allow businesses to reward their customers for checking in with special discounts, prizes, experiences and recognition. The key here is for marketers and small business owners to provide enough value (discounts, prizes, recognition etc.) for customers to want to check in so that customers will share their data with them.

4. Foursquare

Foursquare is one of the more popular location-based social networks that allows users to “check-in” to establishments through a mobile application and is perfect for recreation agencies with physical locations like gyms, parks, recreation centers, pools, fitness centers, and athletic fields. By signing up various facilities with Foursquare, specials and deals can be offered, connections with customers established, management of profile information, and viewing statistics about check-ins are all possible.

5. The Big Four Social Media Platforms

The four main social media platforms as of this writing are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. Currently Facebook likely has the largest and most diverse audience. Facebook, by nature of how it is designed, is about personal relationships and sharing personal information about yourself or your family. Twitter, on the other hand, is about sharing information where people follow those with similar interests (usually strangers). For this reason, recreation departments should view Twitter primarily as information sharing tool, and Facebook as a way to form deeper connections with people.

- **Twitter** — Launched in 2006, is the latest and greatest sensation in social media. Described as a “microblog,” Twitter had more than 100 million users who log in at least once a month as of 2011. The advantage of Twitter is its capability of tying many other technologies together in applications, such as TweetDeck, sharing website links, pictures, and videos. Your single “Tweet” has the potential of reaching millions of Twitter users (whether they are following you or not) through RTs (Re-Tweeting) or keyword searches. Certainly, you have a greater chance of having your message being seen if the user IS a follower.

Twitter Tweet Timing:

- ✓ Traffic is at its peak Monday – Thursday, 9-3 pm
- ✓ Tweets posted after 3 pm on Friday or during the weekend are less likely to be retweeted



- **Facebook** — Although often said in the same breath with Twitter, Facebook is really a different vehicle. Facebook has been available to the general public for about the same time (public launch in September 2006). But its student-only roots from 2004 have helped build a user base of more than 800 million. Unlike Twitter, you have to “friend” someone on Facebook (and be accepted as a friend back) in order to be in their network and participate in group discussions. With a “community feel,” Facebook is much better at facilitating a real connection between people and true two-way dialog and creates energy and engagement easily.



SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



Facebook Posts Timing:

- ✓ Links posted between 1-4 pm result in highest click-through rates
- ✓ During the week, Facebook traffic peaks between 1-3 pm
- ✓ Links posted before 8 am or after 8 pm are less likely to get shared

- **YouTube** — YouTube uses Adobe Flash Video and HTML5 technology to display a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. In 2011, YouTube, Google Inc.'s video website was streaming 4 billion online videos every day, a 25 percent increase in the past eight months, according to the company. One of the great things about YouTube is its sharing functionality. On the other hand, with 48 hours of video being uploaded to YouTube every minute, there is a lot of competition for eyeballs on the site.
- **LinkedIn** — Although it's been around almost twice as long as Twitter (launched in May of 2003), LinkedIn had 64 million users as of 2011. But LinkedIn has a much narrower, business focused community of users and is much better for starting discussion boards. There seems to be a further reach of professionals on LinkedIn, "across America and beyond." While Facebook and Twitter are great vehicles to connect with the community and citizens you serve, if you want to engage and drive members to your services and events, LinkedIn is a place where professionals in the field can connect with each other and exchange ideas related to the job on discussion boards.

DEVELOPING SOCIAL MEDIA USE POLICIES

Emerging platforms for online collaboration are changing the way we work, and offer new ways to engage with customers, colleagues, and the world at large. It is a new model for interaction and social computing that can help employees to build stronger, more successful citizen and agency business relationships. The following are examples of social media policy from the State of Utah Social Media Guidelines.

- Ensure that your agency sanctions official participation and representation on social media sites.
- Stick to your area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives on what is going on at the State, and in other larger contexts.
- Post meaningful, respectful comments, no spam, and no remarks that are off-topic or offensive.
- Pause and think before posting. Reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
- Respect proprietary information, content, and confidentiality.
- When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.

Policy on personal social media use during work hours differs state by state. Some states have policies that allow for *continued Page 4 >*

**Location:**

Five Rivers MetroParks
Dayton, Ohio

Description: Five Rivers MetroParks is a national recognized conservation agency that oversees 16,000 acres of land 90% of which is managed as natural areas. Five Rivers MetroParks has created a well-organized and effective social media program that supports the agency's mission of connecting people to nature.

Challenge: The social media program is intended to target the taxpayers of the area as well as conservation, nature and active lifestyle enthusiasts with relevant content designed to appeal to specific audiences and generate interest in Five Rivers recreation and educational opportunities.

Outcomes: By using a variety of social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Foursquare, and a strong emphasis on content, Five Rivers MetroParks has created a program that engages its audiences. Advance planning, collecting content ideas from internal P&R departments, using free analytics software (analyze results quarterly) and developing high engagement posts all contribute to the effectiveness of the program.

Lessons Learned: Effective strategies employed by Five Rivers MetroParks include:

- Start slow with more generalized content then with growth, branch off into funnels to help identify sources of traffic and areas of interest
- Use photos that can result in three times more engagement than non-photo posts
- One or two times a week post content with a "human face" that is experiential not informational
- Use staff as a resource for interesting content and variety of "voice"
- Cross promote networks through sharing strategies
- Promote opportunities and registrations with a link to a sign-up page
- Find and share interesting facts about parks and recreation
- Re-Tweet park patrons posts and share items of interest
- Use your website, newsletters, press releases, outgoing emails and QR codes to promote social media
- Share with local and national leaders in the park and recreation industry

DAILY DEAL COUPONING

Location: Riverfront Park, Spokane, Washington

Description: Riverfront Park is a large park with rides, theatre and other facilities and occupies 100 acres of land and water with a rich and varied history. Spokane Falls and the surrounding land has long been a gathering place for people.

The Park offers discounts on Winter Day Passes, Summer Day Passes and an option for admission to their Sky Ride or IMAX theatre.

Challenge: Fill available space on rides in the theater and ice rink and attract new users to the park through the use of a group coupon.

Outcomes: Groupon and Living Social, the two dominant group coupon services are geared towards a well-connected, well-educated, and younger demographic than traditional media. Riverfront Park developed a Groupon deal to attract guests to the park by offering discounted tickets on rides in the theatre, at the ice rink, etc.

Lessons Learned: There were some administrative costs associated at the Riverfront Park Guest Services locations but it was less than 5% of the revenue received. Even at a discount, increased use of facilities can draw additional revenue from food purchases, parking and use of other park services. Spokane's Groupon marketing is a great example of how online group discounts are well suited to memberships and passes for facilities.

Daily deal couponing has taken couponing to a new level by allowing discounts on activities such as weekend getaways, concert tickets and dance classes. Now more than ever, online coupons are an effective way to attract new participants, fill programs and boost registration. Controlling redemptions and administrative costs were key to the success of Riverfront Park's group couponing efforts as well as thinking through costs and planning for the increased level of traffic.

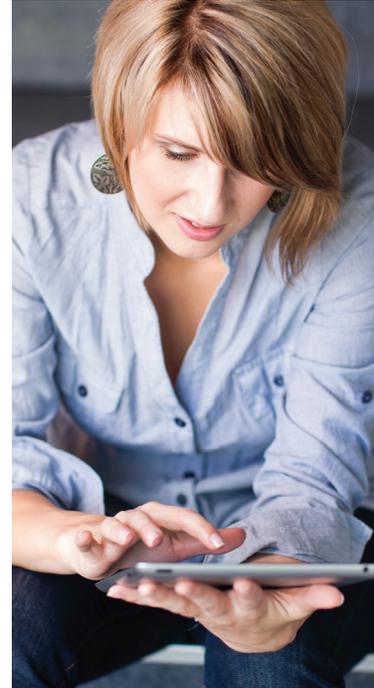
brief access to personal social media sites as long as it does not interfere with that employee's ability to complete his or her work.

The policies in place now are definitely not the last word on social media standards. There is recognition that the policies and guidelines are often living documents that will change as the platforms evolve and new challenges arise.

CONCLUSION

It is now very clear that social media and digital marketing have overcome traditional marketing approaches at least in terms of efficiency, cost effectiveness and ability to reach certain audiences. What still remains unclear are the following: determining what are the best ways that park and recreation agencies can utilize this new medium, which are the most effective digital platforms (they change in popularity constantly and new ones are created every day), and most importantly, what are the protocols that must be followed when using social and digital media to get the most result?

As park and recreation agencies endeavor to understand and make the best use of this new medium, it is a good first step to establish clear objectives for what is to be accomplished, be it general health and wellness messaging, promoting programs and activities, fundraising, recruiting volunteers, or building community support for local park and recreation changes. All are achievable with the right plan of action and well-developed, relevant messaging.



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