



The Washington Report

The Newsletter of the National Association of Police Organizations
Representing America's Finest

October 11, 2013

NAPO WASHINGTON REPORT FLASH

Impact of Social Media on the Law Enforcement Community

NAPO is working to expand its community of social media followers, and we would appreciate your help with these efforts. **Please follow NAPO on Twitter and encourage your members to follow us as well. Our Twitter name is: NAPOPolice. Also, please encourage your members to monitor NAPO on Facebook by clicking the "Like" button on the National Association of Police Organizations Facebook page.**

The importance of social media cannot be overstated. It has become tightly integrated into our daily routines. To illustrate this point, the COPS Office released a Podcast this month, which includes a discussion of the use of social media by the law enforcement community. Sheriff Rich Stanek of the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, highlights the following five uses of social media in the law enforcement community during the Podcast:

1. **Public Relations:** Facebook is used to update the public on press conferences, most wanted individuals, traffic updates, major crime events, threats to critical infrastructure, awards ceremonies, etc.
2. **Community Outreach:** The success of the community policing model really depends upon building trusting relationships with people in the community. The purpose of using Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media is to engage residents as much as possible.
3. **Soliciting Crime Tips:** 86% of Americans are cell phone owners, and 45% of those are Smart phones. Smart phone "tips" apps can be used for community members to send anonymous tips. An average of five billion text messages per day are sent and delivered. The combination of mobile technology with social networking is changing the way everybody communicates, including the criminals. We no longer need a computer or a landline phone. About 25% of the Internet users are mobile-only.
4. **Recruitment:** Social media is used to recruit employees, volunteers, and citizen academy attendees. Social media allows for a broader audience than in-person meetings, and the cost is far less.
5. **Investigations and Crime Solving:** Social media is changing the way investigations are conducted. Notices and photos can be posted on social media sites, which can assist with the location of missing persons or identification of suspects. For example, the day after the Boston Marathon bombings, the superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police asked for photos, videos, or other observations from the crime scene. Citizens provided more than one million images and over 1,000 hours of video footage to the authorities, including the images of the two bombers that were posted on the FBI website, leading to tips on their identities and their personal histories. Americans are fighting terrorism through social media. We need their help because extremists are using social media platforms to identify, groom, radicalize, and communicate with each other.

The transcript of the Podcast is attached at the end of this report. Also, you can listen to this Podcast at the following link: <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=2370>.

If you have any questions about NAPO's social media outreach efforts, please contact Melissa Nee at: mnee@napo.org.

Source:

"Social Media: Hennepin County." *COPS Office: Podcasts*. Community Oriented Policing Services, Oct. 2013. Web. 10 Oct. 2013. <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/html/podcasts/the_beat/10-2013/Stanek-Transcript.txt>.

Please monitor NAPO's website www.napo.org, and Facebook page: National Association of Police Organizations, and follow us on Twitter at NAPOpolice for breaking news and updates.

**Social Media: Hennepin County
October 2013
Transcript**

This is the Beat—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

TeNeane Bradford: Hello. This is TeNeane Bradford with the COPS Office. With us today is Sherriff Rich Stanek of the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office. Hennepin County Sheriff's Office is the largest sheriff's office in Minnesota in the Upper Midwest. Sheriff Stanek is here to discuss how Hennepin County uses social media. At the National Sherriff's Association conference, you discussed the five uses of social media by law enforcement. Can you describe those five uses and give an example of each?

Rich Stanek: Sure. Well, in brief, one way is through public relations. Here at the sheriff's office in Hennepin County, Minnesota, we use Facebook for updating the public on press conferences, our most wanted individuals in the county, maybe lake or traffic updates, major crime events, threats to critical infrastructure, awards ceremonies, our annual open house for families. Sometimes we use it for public safety messaging, links to the media articles, and press conferences that we have about the recent spike in heroin overdoses. Facebook, I think, is a great way to talk about our resources. The subjects go well beyond what folks might see in the mainstream media.

The second part is through community outreach. A little bit different, but we think that the success of the community policing model really depends upon building trusting relationships with people out in the community. The purpose for using Facebook and Twitter and other forms of social media is to engage residents as much as possible. We posted about our free gun lock program and gave away over 100 gun locks recently at our open house just by using social media outreach.

A third way might be through soliciting crime tips. We know that more than 86% of Americans are cell phone owners, and 45% of those are smart phones. We have a sheriff's office downloadable smartphone tips app for anonymous texting tips. A few days after the launch, we got a tip that led to a most-wanted suspect's arrest. Great success with this. For context, an average of five billion text messages per day are sent and delivered. The combination of mobile technology with social networking is changing the way everybody communicates, including the criminals. We no longer need a computer or a landline phone. About 25% of the Internet users are mobile-only. One of my favorite ways to use social media is through recruitment. We use this for recruiting our employees, our volunteers, and our citizen academy attendees. We have the largest population of Somali residents in the nation outside of Mogadishu, and they've been the focus of our targeted community outreach efforts, all the way from citizen academies to meetings with Somali

youth. I firmly believe that our social media efforts contributed to our recent success in recruiting and hiring the nation's first Somali deputy sheriff. We can reach a broader audience online than we can through attending meetings, and the cost is far less.

Another way that we use it in our agency is through investigations and crime solving. This is probably the most significant use of social media for law enforcement. Honestly, social media is changing the way we investigate. This could probably be a whole separate topic. The first is about post notices and photos on social media sites to locate missing persons or identifying suspects. The day after the Boston Marathon bombings, the superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police asked folks for photos, videos, or other observations from the crime scene. What I—citizen cyber sleuths and their crowd sleuths provided more than one million images and over 1,000 hours of video footage to the authorities, including the images of the two bombers that were posted on the FBI website, leading to tips on their identities and their personal histories.

In fact, I'd say that Americans are fighting terrorism through social media. We need their help because extremists are using social media platforms to identify, groom, radicalize, and communicate with each other. They've been uploading video for years and posting photos of imprisoned extremists with captions glorifying their crimes. That's just one example of investigations and crime solving using social media.

TeNeane Bradford: Wow, that's a wealth of information. Let's discuss community outreach. How is Hennepin County Sherriff's Office using social media to do community policing?

Rich Stanek: Well, a couple of ways. One, I think agencies that serve smaller populations with fewer sworn personnel can use social media more often because it serves as a force multiplier, which any police chief or sheriff in this country would love to have. One person can perform several agency goals all at the same time, sitting at one desk. Certainly posting on the Internet takes only a few moments, but the messaging can be, and I think often is, accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, long after the traditional work day and work week are over.

TeNeane Bradford: Can you tell us a little more about the social media platforms that the Hennepin County Sherriff's Office uses and the effectiveness of those platforms?

Rich Stanek: You know, in the last several years, we have tried a number of different social media platforms, some with success, sometimes without success. The ones that we've found that have been most beneficial to us are the ones that we speak often in law enforcement about the advantages of leveraging technology. One of the largest, least expensive, yet most valuable tools we have available to us is social media. Certainly folks know about Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and MySpace. These things are all free. They're free to use. They're free to access with the base startup cost of a smartphone and Internet access.

If Facebook were a country, I read the other day, it would have about the third largest population in the world. The features for Facebook and its interactions change all the time. Using the most popular platforms and staying current with the trends is really important to us here at the sheriff's office and one of our greatest challenge. For each new usage, we work internally to identify the goals for using that particular platform; establishing the parameters for usage by employees; and then provide active training, supervision, and adopting best practices.

TeNeane Bradford: What advice would you give to other sheriff's offices about using social media?

Rich Stanek: Well, that's a great question. What's the one piece of advice you'd give? This is what I'd tell my colleagues across the country. First and foremost, the First Amendment protects the rights of anyone to post on social media sites. Once the statement is made, it's as public as if it had been published in a newspaper. Certainly the First Amendment doesn't protect these statements from being used as evidence because there's no expectation of privacy. Now, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and others that I talked about earlier all can be ordered by a court to produce previous statements, even if they've been deleted. Subpoenas, court orders, and search warrants all can be

obtained for electronic evidence. Facebook has a dedicated 24-hour helpline that assists our detectives in retrieving these documents. Agencies should consider adopting protocols for establishing best practices for use of social media, especially patrolling and monitoring purposes.

Lastly, agencies and protocols adopted in New York City and the Georgia Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and elsewhere require officers and analysts to register aliases with their supervisors and seek their authorization before using web crawlers. I encourage my colleagues across the country to be sure to check with your local county or district attorney regarding any state laws that may apply or best practices that should be followed.

TeNeane Bradford: Sherriff Stanek, thank you so much for your time and expertise.

Rich Stanek: I hope it was helpful.

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