Friends, Fans, and Followers: Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM TCRP SYNTHESIS REPORT 99

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Introduction
Research Overview
Research approach

- Research conducted between November 2010 and September 2011
- Literature review
- Online survey
  - Conducted in February 2011
  - Convenience sample of agencies known to use social media
  - 34 agencies responded (90% response rate)
- Six follow-up cases
Survey respondents
- 18 US states
- District of Columbia
- 5 Canadian provinces

Case examples
- Bay Area Rapid Transit (CA)
- Dallas Area Rapid Transit (TX)
- Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (PA)
- Metropolitan Transportation Authority (NY)
- Mountain Line (WV)
- TransLink (BC)

Respondents and case example locations
Survey: How transit agencies use social media
## Most matched platform to type of information

Multiple responses allowed.

Responses expressed as percentage of total responding agencies (N=35).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>YouTube</th>
<th>LinkedIn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency news</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service alerts (real-time)</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contests and promotions</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting and event notices</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service info (static)</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press releases and statements</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other news</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature stories</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job listings</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public hearing comments</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goals for using social media

Average rating by importance (1-4), where 1= “Not important at all” and 4=“Very important.”

N/A responses were excluded.

- Communicate with current riders: 4.0
- Improve customer satisfaction: 3.8
- Improve agency image: 3.7
- Reach potential riders: 3.6
- Strengthen community support: 3.5
- Distribute real-time service info: 3.5
- Increase ridership: 3.3
- Distribute general service info: 3.3
- Obtain feedback on projects: 3.2
- Save money: 2.6
- Recruit and keep staff: 1.9
Effectiveness of social media in achieving goals

Average rating by effectiveness (1-4), where 1="Not effective at all" and 4="Very effective."

N/A responses were excluded
Importance v. effectiveness

Compare average ratings of importance of goals and effectiveness in meeting goals.
## Target markets for social media

Multiple responses allowed.

Responses expressed as percentage of total responding agencies (N=33).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>YouTube</th>
<th>LinkedIn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday riders</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adults</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External stakeholders</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minorities</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income communities</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors/Older Americans</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency employees</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effectiveness in reaching target markets

Average rating by effectiveness (1-4), where 1=”Not effective at all” and 4=”Very effective.”

N/A responses were excluded

- Everyday riders: 3.3
- Students: 3.2
- Young adults: 3.2
- External stakeholders: 3.0
- Agency employees: 2.9
- Minorities: 2.7
- People with disabilities: 2.6
- Low-income communities: 2.5
- Seniors / Older Americans: 2.2
Common barriers and obstacles to using social media
Barriers to using social media

Average rating by importance (1-4), where 1= “Not important at all” and 4=“Very important.”

N/A responses were excluded.

- No staff available: 2.8
- Open to criticism: 2.7
- Takes too much time: 2.3
- Riders don't have tech: 2.2
- Prefer traditional approach: 2.1
- People with disabilities can’t access: 2.1
- Requires IT support: 2.0
- Managers don’t see benefits: 2.0
- User privacy: 1.9
- Can't archive posts: 1.8
- Staff will waste time: 1.8
- Cybersecurity: 1.7
- Seniors don't use: 1.7
- Minorities don't use: 1.6
Three top concerns

- “We don’t have the resources to run a social media campaign.”
- “We won’t be able to control the conversation.”
- “Our riders don’t use social media.”
Agency staff investment in social media

Hours per month by agency size.
Large urban N = 22
Small urban/Rural N = 7

“We don’t have the resources.”

Social media is free...like a puppy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours per month</th>
<th>Large Urban</th>
<th>Small Urban/Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-20 hours</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-40 hours</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-80 hours</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81+ hours</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agency staff investment in social media

Social media is free...like a puppy.
You won’t... and some agencies are concerned that an online presence will leave them vulnerable to criticism.

It’s appropriate to manage illegal or offensive behavior, but...

Thick-skinned agencies can use social media to learn about their riders and their service.

It won’t always be pretty, but social media can provide unfiltered (and free) customer research.
“Our riders don’t use social media.”

Think again...They probably do.

Half of U.S. adults now use social media.

The average LinkedIn user is 44 years old.

Young women aged 18-29 are the social media power users.

Social networking use shows little variation by income, race, ethnicity, education, or location.

One in four Facebook users is 45 or older.
Percent of people with a profile on a social networking site by age group, 2008-2011
Age distribution across 19 social networking sites, 2010
Other concerns

Can our riders access the information we present to them?
- Provide captions and <ALT> tags.
- Offer information in alternative formats.

Does my agency have to keep records?
- Rules on record-keeping and archiving are evolving.
- Know what your state or locality requires.

Will social media expose my agency to cyber-threats?
- Experts say it’s a risk.
- Stay vigilant and think before you click.
Social media policy

- Employee access
- Account oversight
- Acceptable use
- Employee conduct
- Content
- Security
- Legal issues
- User conduct
Lessons learned
What advice did practitioners offer?

- Keep social media in perspective
- Consider the organizational impacts
- Find the right voice
- Listen, listen, listen
- Respect the strengths of social media
- Have fun
- Just get started
- And keep moving
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