

How Facebook Is Used In Operations at National Weather Service Binghamton, NY

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In the spring of 2010, the National Weather Service began to explore the application of Facebook as a tool to expand the reach of NWS information at field offices and national centers. Based on positive results from this exploration, Facebook was expanded to all 122 National Weather Service forecast offices in the summer of 2011 and became an operational tool in July 2013. As a tool, Facebook can be very effective at educating users, disseminating messages, and allowing for a wider audience. Facebook can also provide an important source of incoming information during significant weather events. Experience has shown that in order to gain the greatest possible benefits from Facebook, posts need to be appropriate for a wide range of social media users, and not just a regurgitation of information that could be obtained from local web pages. This presentation will review the implementation of Facebook at the National Weather Service office in Binghamton, NY, including results and best practices that have been learned over the last year. A case study from a snowstorm February 5th, 2014 will be shown to illustrate how social media can be used to both disseminate and receive weather information before, during, and after an event.

Experiences since implementation indicate that posting during more favorable times of day, such as the early evening, increases the visibility of posts. Asking questions to elicit user feedback can be especially useful when trying to fill in data gaps if “ground truth” is missing during weather events. It is crucial when posting to recognize that posts with graphics tend to get more engagement while status posts (text only) reach more people. Creating engaging and creative content such as photo contests ensures fans are more likely to see future posts. Lastly, active weather is by far the best likely time for your page to grow. By having a strong presence on social media such as Facebook, there is a greater chance of success in communicating with and expanding your audience and in return, meeting a core mission goal of protecting life and property. By executing these learned best practices, as of May 2014 the Facebook page of the Weather Forecast Office in Binghamton, NY continues to be the most “liked” page in the Eastern Region of the National Weather Service, and in the top five out of 122 forecast offices nationwide, despite having a relatively small population.