Choosing a Social Media Platform for Reentry Programs: four popular options

Facebook

What is it?

Facebook is one of the most widely used social networking platforms in the world. Its purpose is to connect family and friends. Non-profits, government agencies, and businesses can create Facebook Pages to help promote brand awareness, share information, connect with broad audiences, and build relationships. A program's Facebook "Page" is the equivalent of an individual's Facebook "Profile."

Who uses it?

In the U.S., 79% of adults between the ages 18 and 49 use Facebook.

How to use it?

Facebook "Groups" are another way to connect directly with users. Groups offer a space for new or existing communities to engage directly with each other. Groups can be public or private. A Group administrator(s) will post content, regulate membership, and serve as a moderator(s) of content that any group member posts, and enforce the Group rules as needed. Here are some questions to consider when deciding whether to create a Page or Group for your program.

Frequency of posting

Aim for consistency when posting. For example, if you decide to post twice each week, stick to that schedule. Your audience will know that they can visit your page at any given time and expect two fresh posts every week. In general, post no more than once per day, with a goal of 1x each day.

Tips

Speak in the first person in your posts – your audience wants to hear from you! Share candid personal stories, like updates from program staff, participants, or volunteers. Revisit the webinar "Storytelling for Second Chance Act Programs" for detailed guidance. Build dialog on your Facebook Page with interactive content. Ask your audience to take an action, i.e. click a link or respond to a poll. Keep in mind that "comments" and "shares" are more valuable than "likes" because users are engaging with your content and increasing your program's visibility by sharing your content with their networks.
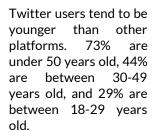
Twitter

What is it?

Twitter is platform that focuses on content that can be quickly consumed by its users in almost real-time. Non-profits and government agencies can use Twitter to advocate for issues about their mission, to be a leading voice in their industry, and to build and cultivate a community. Posts, called "tweets," are public by default and anyone can share or interact with them. Users will see tweets as they happen, meaning the most recent tweets will be at the top of their feed.

Who uses it?

Twitter users tend to be younger than other platforms. 73% are under 50 years old, 44% are between 30-49 years old, and 29% are between 18-29 years old.

How to use it?

Tweets must be 140 characters or less. Users are attracted to snappy, easily digestible tweets. Include a link (URL/ website address) wherever possible, so that people can read more about an issue, and to promote traffic to your program's website or page. For step-by-step instructions, see here.

Frequency of posting

Again, be consistent. Figure out how much time you can devote to the platform. Twitter updates chronologically, so posting more often increases your potential to reach more users. Aim to have a staff member or volunteer tweet 3-5 times per day, particularly if there is a specific newsworthy or upcoming event to share. If you have limited time, plan out your tweets each week.

Tips

Share news and timely content, and video. According to Twitter, tweets with video get 10x the engagement and watching video is one of the main reasons people access Twitter. Use hashtags. Tweets with hashtags get 100% more engagement. To learn more about hashtags, read this.

LinkedIn

What is it?

LinkedIn is a professional networking platform. It is used most often used by employers to identify potential job candidates and by job seekers to learn about an organization's practices and culture. Businesses, government agencies, and non-profits use LinkedIn to build credibility, develop a strong network, and learn from industry peers. With 30+ million users on LinkedIn, there are opportunities to find or strengthen partnerships, get seen by foundations, and stay informed about leaders in your field.

Who uses it?

Adults between 30 and 49 years are the largest age group using LinkedIn. Users access LinkedIn to build their professional profile and networks. Users tend to have significant work experience and high levels of education.

How to use it?

Create a LinkedIn page for your program that includes your program's mission and/or vision, describes what your program does, and lets users know how to access more information about your program. Users who "Follow" your page will automatically be notified when you post content to your page or make other updates. "LinkedIn For Nonprofits" is a paid subscription and can be used it to help your program find talent (hire staff, identify board members), build program awareness, and fundraise or recruit volunteers.

Frequency of posting

Remember that LinkedIn is primarily a business networking platform and users typically access LinkedIn during work hours and days. Studies also show that users are less likely to click on posts, and thereby less likely to access content, if a company posts more than five times a week. Try to consistently post between two to five times each week.

Tips

If you have one, be sure to include your program's logo—pages with logos are visited six times more than those without one. Increase traffic to your page by adding a "Follow" button to your program website, emails, and/or newsletters. 57% of users access the platform using mobile devices so keep your posts short and provide links to mobile-friendly pages. For more tips, see here.
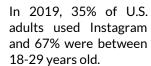
Instagram

What is it?

Instagram is a mobile phone application for sharing visual content and is ideal for publishing photographs and videos to tell a story. Users build networks on Instagram by "following" each other and interacting with posted content through "likes," "comments," and "shares" (re-posting of content). To respond privately to posts, users can also directly message one another. Over one billion people use Instagram. Businesses, non-profits, and government agencies use the platform to build their brand.

Who uses it?

In 2019, 35% of U.S. adults used Instagram and 67% were between 18-29 years old.

How to use it?

Instagram pages are made up a user's name, bio or brief description, profile picture, and posted photos or videos. For each post, add a description of your image or video in the caption. Always try to use a hashtag so that your post will come up when users search that hashtag. If the photograph or video includes other people or programs on Instagram, tag them as well. Stories are like posts except your photos or videos disappear after 24 hours and allow users to frequently post content without overloading followers.

Frequency of posting

To stay relevant to your followers, try to post once or twice a day—63% of users access Instagram daily. Most important though, again, is consistency. Try to avoid posting many posts in a very short period, or only posting every few weeks.

Tips

Save stories to your "Story Highlights," so that they remain on your profile. Include links in your bio where followers can access additional information about your program. Minimize the app's data usage by turning on the "Use Less Data" feature. To do so, start at your profile page and click the cog wheel in the upper righthand corner, scroll to "Cellular Data Use" in the Account section, and toggle on "Use Less Data." For more tips on how to use Instagram, read this.

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