



9 Social Media Best Practices for Law Enforcement

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In recent years, social media has become a trusted source to receive news and information. Law enforcement agencies are harnessing the power of social media to build relationships with residents and effectively communicate relevant information. Social media can be used to create awareness about local crimes, promote community events such as parades or town hall meetings and increase positive resident-police relationships. Agencies are also using social media to build an on-line presence with department specific branding. These are just a few ways law enforcement and public safety are leveraging social media, below you will find 9 best practices to follow when establishing department social media channels.

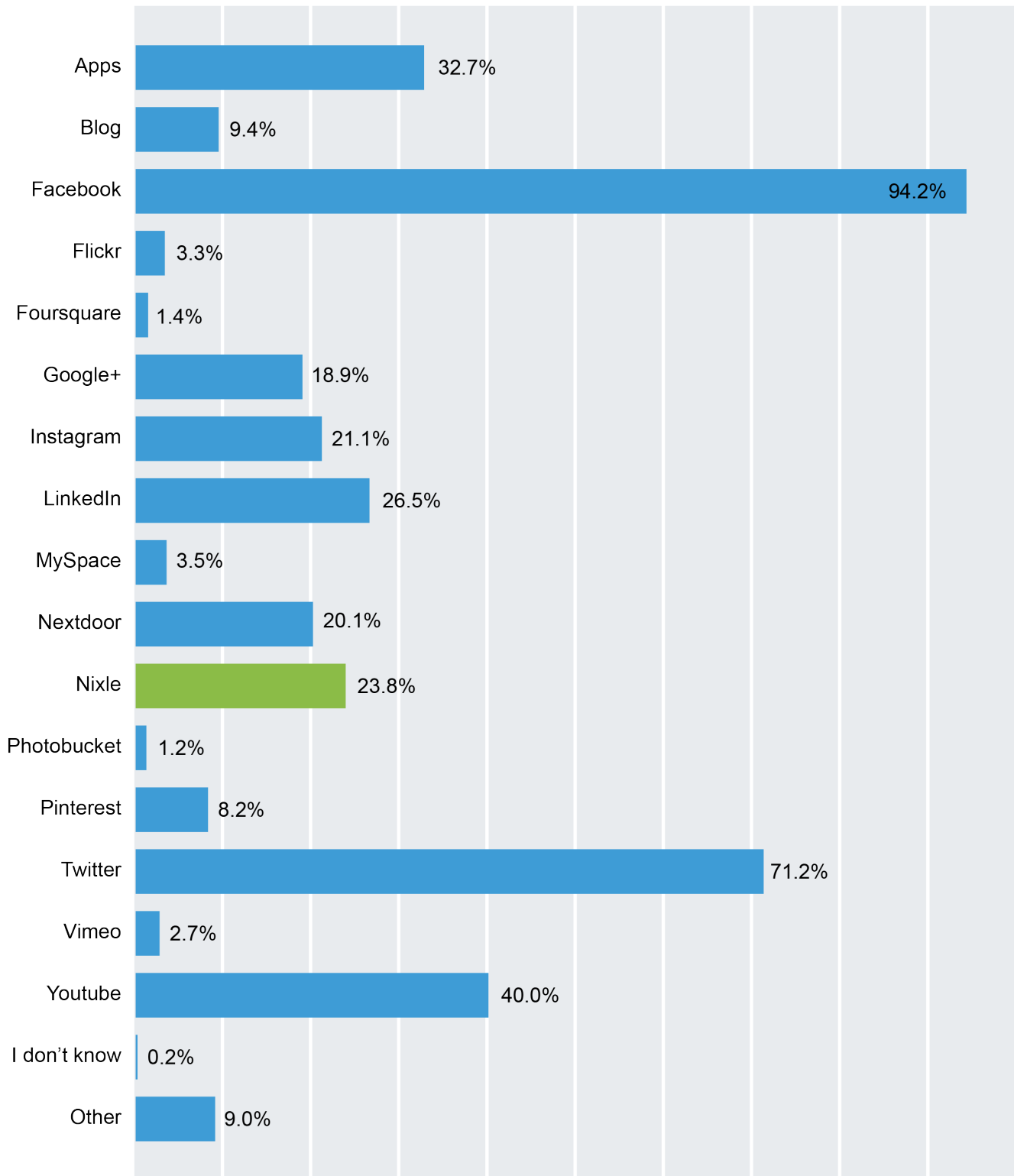
Every year, the [International Association of Chiefs of Police](#) conducts a survey of police agencies to examine the current usage and issues they are facing regarding social media. The most recent results show that 96.4% of agencies surveyed already use social media as part of their communication strategies. This is a marked increase from 88.1% from the 2011 survey.

The graph below reflects how usage of each social media tool has increased from 2011 to 2015. According to the historical IACP survey data, the five most commonly used social media channels are [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Nixle](#), and [LinkedIn](#). It's worth noting that the top five channels have not changed since the 2011 survey.

Given these findings, we can see that law enforcement agencies are finding the value of adding social media to their communication strategies to better serve their communities. **So the question is no longer “Are you using social media?” but now turns to “Are you using social media effectively?”.**

Here's a list of tips and best practices to help law enforcement agencies make the most out of social media in their departments:

What social media tools does your agency currently use?



[View the Full Survey Here](#)

96.4%

Of agencies surveyed by the IACP in 2015 already use social media

CHOOSE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS WISELY

1

There are many options when choosing a social media platform to communicate with residents. It's important to choose ones that residents are using the most and can access on a daily basis. It's best to pick one or two to start with, then grow from there. Typically Facebook and Twitter will be your best options.

DETERMINE YOUR AUDIENCE

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Delivering relevant information that your audience cares about will help ensure retention within your follower base. Your audience will differ depending on the social media channel. For example, Facebook is perfect for announcing community updates and happenings. Mass communication systems, however, should be leveraged for critical emergency notifications.

TIME POSTS APPROPRIATELY

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Users generally check their social media accounts throughout the day, but there are optimal times to post to make sure your message reaches a larger audience. According to a blog post from [Fannit](#)¹, Facebook has the most users online during the weekdays from 6am and 8am and between 2pm and 5pm. Twitter's optimal posting times are on weekends between 1pm and 3pm.

HAVE A PROTOCOL IN PLACE

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According to the latest [IACP Social Media Survey results](#),² 77.8% of public safety agencies that use social media have a policy in place, an additional 11.7% are in the process of creating one. Having a policy

¹ <http://fannit.com/social-media-infographic-best-times-to-post/>

² <http://www.iacpsocialmedia.org/Portals/1/documents/FULL%202015%20Social%20Media%20Survey%20Results.pdf>

creates a clear understanding of what is appropriate to post and on which social channel it should be published to. This will create transparency across departments and a clear understanding of how to best use social media within the agency.

ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

- 5** Amplify your message and post content that is important to the community so they like, comment, share, and re-tweet with their personal networks. This can help ensure a larger portion of your population receives your message. Remember, engaging content opens up communication between the agency and its residents.
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CONSISTENCY IS KEY

- 6** To ensure you have the ears of your communities, make sure your posts are sent regularly with relevant information. Posting relevant information often such as special event information, crime prevention tips or information on missing person will help establish credibility with your residents. It is important to delegate a social media point person such a Public Information Officer to handle this on a regular basis.
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COMBINE YOUR EFFORTS

- 7** Manually updating every single communication channel during an emergency can cost time, manpower, and possibly lives. Using solution, such as Nixle Community Engagement that can post to social media and send texts and emails with a single click will maximize your reach and ensure that citizens get agency messages in a timely manner.
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IT DOESN'T TAKE AN ARMY

- 8** Social media can be used by departments of all sizes. It can be scaled depending on available manpower while still accommodating the needs of the community to stay informed. In addition, types of events that are being messaged can be delegated to different departments or persons.
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SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT THE END ALL BE ALL

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Social media is a great tool to have for your department, but it should not be the only method of communication you use. Not every resident in your community follows or has 'liked' your page. Even if your follower numbers are high, there is no guarantee that they will be actively checking your page during an emergency. Having other channels of emergency communication in addition to your social media pages will expand the scope of who you reach with important information.

It's important to remember that social media is not a passing trend and is becoming a popular avenue for residents to get news and information. In the end, it's the law enforcement agencies' responsibility to proactively reach out to their entire community make sure that they're informed and kept safe.

About Nixle Community Engagement, by Everbridge

Engaged and active communities are built on a commitment to transparency and safety. Our Community Engagement application helps public safety and emergency management agencies to easily create a resident opt-in database, while providing you with control over authoring and publishing your message directly to the public.

Community Engagement enables:

- **Easy Resident Opt-in:** Easily increase resident opt-in's at an exponential rate. Maintain a robust database of resident contact information to foster a community dialogue or provide effective emergency notifications.
- **A Force Multiplier:** Publish and distribute public information at scale, with the push of one button, via social media, websites, email, text, **OneBridge** mobile app, and Google Alerts. Leverage residents to act as force multiplier to assist in preventing and solving crime. Ideal when internal resources are limited.
- **Control Public Information Dissemination:** Maintain complete power and control to author messages and disseminate information to the public at will.
- **Precise Neighborhood Targeting:** The most precise neighborhood-level geographic targeting system available. Send messages to specific communities or neighborhoods.
- **Focus on Public Safety:** The most trusted public safety product on the market, as used by over 8,000 public safety agencies. Completely focused on helping agencies keep residents safe and informed.