



Digital Media Best Practices

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The digital media best practices page covers national trends surrounding commonly used digital/social outreach channels, their best use scenarios, and recommendations based on today's trends.

When a system of care community asks which digital platforms and social networks they should be using, there are three important items to consider:

1. **Target Audience**—Who is your target audience(s) and where are they most represented online and on social media?
2. **Objectives and Purpose**—What is the purpose of your online activities? How will your social media messages and content support your larger social marketing/communications strategy? What is the action that you want your engaged audiences to do? Is it to engage in services and supports? To increase awareness about children's mental health or the systems of care approach?
3. **Process and Resources**—What resources do you have to devote to your social and digital media strategy? Consider potential writers, graphic designers, social media publishers, and community managers. Who are the key approvers on messaging and rapid responses as needed? How about paid media budget for social media amplification? How will you evaluate your efforts?

Below is a list of commonly used social media networks and digital/social outreach channels, their best-use scenarios, and complementary app suggestions based on today's trends and insights. Because your audiences, topics, and campaign content will vary from effort to effort, it's important to regularly gather insights and analytics from your profiles and adapt your efforts to your findings.

Facebook

- **Demographic:** According to Pew Research Center, 79 percent of U.S. adult internet users are on Facebook. Facebook is used widely across all age groups. For ages 50–64, Facebook use significantly surpasses other social media platform use.
- **Business Page:** A Facebook Business Page is a public profile used to post information about your organization. In addition to posting capabilities like that of personal pages, a Facebook Business Page offers other functionalities such as hours of operation, website information, and call-to-action buttons, among other various templates based on type of services offered. Most importantly, Facebook Business Pages can provide page access to a number of team members of varying roles and access to manage the page, including administrators, advertisers, and editors.
- **Best uses:** News and announcements; event highlights; photos or albums; online conversations among community and directly with organization; links to relevant articles or blog posts; videos.
- **Pro tip:** Use Facebook's own built-in scheduler to schedule posts ahead of time. Use its own built-in "Insights" feature to explore analytics information for your posts.
- **To hashtag or not to hashtag:** Hashtags on Facebook are helpful in tagging specific campaigns or initiatives. They can also be used to categorize a topic/conversation so that it may be

aggregated into a larger conversation, but it is not as widely used for that purpose since many personal posts and comments from Facebook audiences may be private to the public.

- **Facebook Live:** This latest and very popular feature allows you to broadcast video in real time for your followers to watch and/or interact. Great for special event moments and announcements, a behind-the-scenes look, and personalized video updates. For more info, go to www.live.fb.com/about.

Instagram

- **Demographic:** Now the second most used social media platform in the U.S. with 32 percent of adult Internet users, Instagram skews significantly toward younger adults (ages 18–29).
- **Best uses:** Creative or aesthetically pleasing photos (don't forget to use the built-in filters and photo effects to maximize visual impact); humor and aspirational content; short-lived content known as "Stories."
- **Complementary apps:**
 - **Hyperlapse:** Allows you to make time-lapse videos.
 - **Boomerang:** Allows you to make one-second video loops to post on Instagram (and often work on other social networks too).
 - **Layout:** Allows you to create collages of multiple photos in pre-designed grids.
 - **TagsForLikes:** Aggregates most-used hashtags to copy and paste into posts.
- **Hashtags:** On Instagram, the rules of hashtags are simple. The more hashtags you use, the more likes you're going to get. The downside is your posts might look a bit spam-like to your most engaged followers, so consider balancing which hashtags you use. Best practice allows for up to 10 hashtags within a post.
- **Pro tip:** When on mobile, you can easily discover popular hashtags to consider. Start writing a hashtag with the "#" sign and a dropdown menu with possible hashtags and their number of occurrences will appear.
- **Instagram Stories:** A Snapchat-like feature within the Instagram app, this allows you to post photos and videos in a slideshow format that disappear after 24 hours. Already, the service has more daily users than Snapchat.

Some of the popular mental health hashtags include:

- #mentalhealth
- #mentalhealthmatters
- #childrensmentalhealthmatters
- #CMHAW2020
- #mentalhealthawareness
- #wellness
- #mindfulness
- #behavioralhealth

Twitter

- **Demographic:** 24 percent of U.S. adult Internet users are on Twitter. Internet users in urban areas are much more likely to use Twitter than users in suburban or rural areas. Unlike Facebook and Instagram, more men use Twitter than women.
- **Best uses:** News and announcements; customer service; links to articles or blog posts; micro-blogging; live tweeting from events; participation in trending conversations.
- **Helpful additional apps:**
 - **Buffer:** Though not owned by Twitter, Buffer is a free app that allows you to draft and schedule up to 10 tweets ahead of time. Unlike Facebook, Twitter doesn't have its own native scheduler for posts.
 - **Hootsuite** and **TweetDeck** - very versatile free versions
- **Hashtags:** Twitter is the website that invented the hashtag. Use #hashtags on Twitter—but only up to two at a time! Any more than that and you run the risk of your content appearing to be spam. Be careful when creating new hashtags for your campaigns. Conduct research to ensure that the hashtag has not been taken or can be misread. When tweeting within the context of a larger conversation, use hashtags that already have established user practice or communities behind them. Don't hashtag random words—they have zero effect on search results.
- **Twitter Moments:** Consider using Twitter Moments, a feature within the Twitter app and website, to aggregate and publish a series of relevant tweets from a tweet-worthy moment together in one place. For your Twitter Moment, you can aggregate a mix of your tweets along with other relevant tweets from other accounts.

Tips and best practices:

1. The best Twitter profiles don't just share links; they begin conversations, interact with users, and have a personal tone behind the account.
2. Twitter already automatically shortens all URLs while still showing the domain name by using a service like Bit.ly, which hides the domain name.

LinkedIn

- **Demographic:** 29 percent of U.S. adult Internet users are on LinkedIn. LinkedIn has grown from a job search platform to a strong social media platform for professional development.
- **Best uses:** Thought leadership and/or subject matter expertise; networking opportunities; partnership development; organizational news and announcements such as job opportunities; participation or moderation of topic-specific groups.
- **LinkedIn Showcase Pages:** These subpages allow organizations to showcase specific campaigns, initiatives, products, or sub-brands. Showcase Pages have their own destination and ability to post relevant content and amass followers, but they do not have all the features of a company/organization page.

Tips and best practices:

1. Company Pages are SEO-friendly. Google previews up to 156 characters of your page text, so be sure that your description leads with powerful, keyword-rich copy.

2. If your organization has a global presence, LinkedIn offers capabilities to show the page and Company Pages in 20 different languages.

Snapchat

- **Demographic:** Snapchat is the youngest social media platform on this list. It is a mobile-first on-the-go social media community but boasts strong daily engagement among youth and young adults (ages 12–34). In the U.S., the audience growth has plateaued some, but is expected to surpass Twitter and Pinterest in 2017.
- **Best uses:** One-way conversations (though you can snap with other users, for brands and organizations, it's best to keep your communication limited to your one-way story); humor; behind-the-scenes of events, meetings, or conferences; storytelling.
- **Best times for engagement:** Content on Snapchat is short-lived and lasts 24 hours. The best time to post is whenever the content you're recording is happening!
- **Snapchat Memories:** A feature within the Snapchat app allows you to save Stories in the cloud or your phone and to share photos and videos taken any time in the past that are saved on your phone.

Tips and best practices:

1. Snapchat is an invasive storytelling tool—but it's easy to use that to your advantage. The best Snapchat Stories let us peer into a sector of someone's life or an organization's process that isn't normally showcased, all while telling a good story.
2. Consider finding influencers in your community for a Snapchat takeover.
3. When in doubt, be funny. Everyone appreciates a laugh, and Snapchat users more so.

Tumblr

The best way to think about Tumblr is that it's basically Twitter for longer form content. You can re-blog posts (in the same way you would retweet a tweet), favorite posts (in the same way you would favorite a post on Twitter), and many posts are found by searching hashtags. There is no limit to the length of each post.

- **Best uses:** Humor; visual content; GIFs; mental health awareness (**There is a huge mental health advocacy community on Tumblr**); witty content; television, film, or literature fandom content.
- **Helpful additional apps:** To keep up, you're probably going to want to search (or create) some GIFs at <https://giphy.com/>.
- **Hashtags:** Just like Twitter, Tumblr posts are found and archived by their hashtags. Unlike Twitter, the hashtags are non-obtrusive and hidden below posts so they won't appear to be spam.

Tips and best practices:

1. Unlike Twitter and Facebook, Tumblr is not as effective at linking to external sources. It's best to use Tumblr as a means of engaging with your community within its own parameters.
2. Tumblr has a message inbox feature that encourages anonymity; you can decide to lift the anonymity component or to deactivate the feature entirely at your own discretion.
3. Make sure to follow relevant blogs and engage with them in authentic ways. Tumblr blogs thrive by the engagement of their loyal followings.

4. Unlike another blog service, Tumblr blogs can find success in only re-blogging posts. However, the best Tumblr blogs are known for specific content. Find your niche and stay with it.

Popular mental health Tumblr blogs include:

- www.recoveryandmentalhealth.tumblr.com
- www.notcrazyorg.tumblr.com
- www.ok2talk.org
- www.mentalillnessmouse.tumblr.com
- www.noshameinoursickness.tumblr.com
- www.copingdaily.tumblr.com
- www.blackgirlmentalhealth.tumblr.com

YouTube

As video becomes a staple in impactful communication strategies, YouTube (the world's second largest search engine) continues to be a strong social media platform for organizations to leverage. In addition to using YouTube as a way to host videos for the purpose of embedding them elsewhere, many organizations miss the opportunity to tap into the attentive and large audiences the platform has cultivated.

- **Demographic:** 63 percent of U.S. internet users are on YouTube. Among 18–49 age group, YouTube accounts for 66 percent of videos watched across devices and platforms.
- **Best uses:** Short-form videos; shareable and discoverable content; popular content (e.g., How-to, Music, or Animals).
- **Hashtags:** Similar to hashtags, YouTube tags are used to index content on YouTube. There is no limit! Also, be sure to add concise descriptions to your videos to quickly inform your viewers whether or not the video content is indeed what they are looking for. The descriptions also contribute to discoverability in both YouTube and Google searches. (Remember, Google owns YouTube!)

Tips:

1. Consider the feedback you get from YouTube (be it comments or when your videos get the most engagement, what types of titles work best, when your videos are upvoted or downvoted, and so forth).
2. Build a channel and playlists with a specific content area in mind.
3. Have a schedule. Viewers are much more likely to subscribe if they know you will be publishing content regularly (for ex. once a week on Tuesdays) than if they think you're just uploading content whenever it suits your need to embed a video on another website.
4. Include relevant links in your YouTube description as a way to pull audiences who are interested in learning more.

Blogging

Blogging is still the best way to share longer, more complex ideas in spaces that are permanent and easily searchable. It's also one of the best ways to keep your website relevant and at the top of search engine results.

- **Self-hosted (most likely WordPress.org):** Self-hosted blogs let you set up on your own website's server. Though there are a few companies that provide this kind of service, the most widely used and most intuitive is WordPress. In fact, WordPress is often used as a content management system (CMS),

and is more than suitable to use for an entire website—not just the blogging component. Self-hosted blogs are completely customizable, unlike blogs set up at different providers.

- **Best uses:** Longer-form content and complex ideas; content with multiple accompanying media; articles; beginning discussions; search engine optimization.
- **Best times for engagement:** Until your website or blog becomes a mainstay with your readership, the best times for engagement will coincide with your online engagement on social media as content shared there can be a good source of referrals to your website.
- **Complementary apps: WordPress** is known for its bevy of third party plugins, all indexed at <https://wordpress.org/plugins/>.
 - Other popular self-host blogging options:
 - **Squarespace**
 - **Wix**
 - **Joomla**
- **Hashtags:** Hashtags will not work on your self-hosted blog (unless you find a plugin for it). However, blogs usually do use categories and tags to label and structure posts. But these will only serve to index posts within your own site and not on external websites.

Tips and best practices:

1. The ideal blog post length is however long it takes to cogently convey your message. That being said, many find that 600 words is optimal for getting shares. Meanwhile 1,000+ words is optimal for comments.
2. A self-hosted blog, though sometimes easy to maintain, is usually too complex for someone who isn't a professional to set up. Consult with your web manager.

Newsletters

Best uses: Keeping targeted segment(s) informed and engaged; marketing events or products; one-way conversations; sharing interesting content or ideas.

Best time for engagement: Monday–Wednesday from 9 a.m.–12 p.m., in general. However, it's best to look at your own analytics and see when the users in your email list are the most engaged.

Tips and best practices:

1. Do not discount the newsletter just yet. Though we live in the age of social media, content straight to someone's email inbox is still the most highly engaged with.
2. Opening rates for nonprofit newsletters are around 20 percent. Click-through rates are around 5 percent or below. Don't feel as though your newsletter needs to get astronomically high open and click-through rates to be successful.
3. Use services like **MailChimp** or **Constant Contact**. Besides having pre-made templates, **the most valuable tool these services provide is statistics**; you want to know how many people opened, clicked, what kind of subject lines were successful, which users are the most loyal, and who doesn't click at all. They will also provide contextual data so you can understand how you perform compared to newsletters in similar industries.
4. **Carefully craft your email subject—this is the most important aspect of your entire newsletter**, because it determines whether or not a recipient will open and read your content. Examples:
 - Bad subject line: REGISTER FOR OUR WEBINAR TODAY!

- Good subject line: The Social Marketing in Rural Communities webinar takes place June 23 - Register now!

Most importantly, keep your subject line short and test subject lines with your email list (most newsletter services will allow you to A/B test campaigns, too).

5. Carefully craft the first sentence of your newsletter. This first sentence is usually, in a pre-made template, above the header of your newsletter. This sentence is the first thing a user reads in the description section of their email and is second only to your subject line in determining whether someone opens your newsletter or not.
6. Categorize your email list. This way you can send targeted messages.
7. Stick with a schedule. People will come to expect your newsletter at a certain time of the week or month, and you don't want to disappoint them.
8. It's also recommended to send a newsletter at least once a month, but it's fine to send more frequent emails or alerts leading up to a large event.
9. Include a call to action in your emails. Monthly newsletters will often include many calls to action, but regular email updates should have one clear call to action (following a social media profile, registering for an event, etc.).