

# Social Media Best Practices



Engaging with the public to build trust and goodwill



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# Should your agency be on social media?

Probably.

- It's where a huge amount of your public already goes for information
- It allows you to engage with the public in real-time in a way nothing else does.
- It allows you to humanize your agency and the people who work for it.
- It allows you to reach a large audience quickly in case of emergencies.
- It shows that you are willing to engage the public where they are.
- It goes a long way in building transparency, trust, and good will.
- But. ...

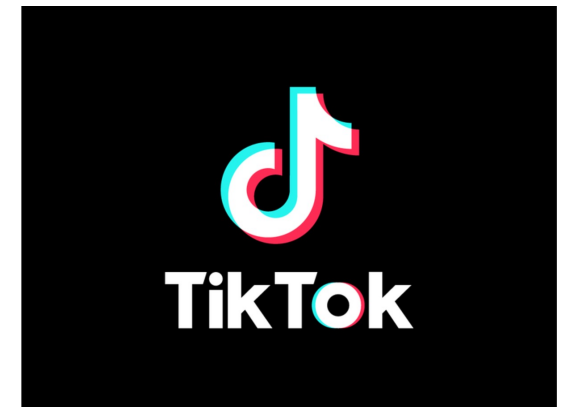


# It is not as simple as just doing a post

## What to ask yourself

- What platforms make sense for us, and what platforms do we have the capacity to actively maintain?
- What platforms do our citizens most actively use?
- What kind of content do we want to push out?
- Are we prepared to engage with the public consistently?
- What voice/tone do we want to use?
- Who is going to be doing the posting/responding?
- Where/how will we be generating your content?
- Why do we want to be on XXX platform?
- Are we prepared to handle negative comments?

# Where's WSDOT?



# How the public typically views government communications



# But that's not who we are! So show them



Washington State DOT   
@wsdot

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If you are a Seahawks fan, and you are driving, and you are listening to the radio, and you hear about Russell Wilson. ...please don't drive off the road. Calmly pull over, and then react.



WSDOT   
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I, for one, welcome our new arachnid overlords.



wsdot We were so proud last week when three of our maintenance workers were honored during the Washington State Patrol 6th District annual awards ceremony for their efforts last winter to locate Lynell McFarland, a 68-year-old who had been missing for four days over an embankment on a snowy Blewett Pass.





## OK, but how do we show them?

- **Be authentic.** Don't be afraid to be who you are and let a little of your personality come out. The public WANTS to know there are real people doing this work.
- That doesn't mean you have to be snarky, or be a comedian. It just means you should **communicate with the public the way you would communicate with your friends/family.**
- **Tell stories.** Give the public something to invest their time and attention in. And tell them in a way that you would want to hear them. If you're bored by your content, they will be too.
- **Be RESPONSIVE!!!!** Social media is designed for two-way interaction. People go there expecting to be heard and get answers. Simply by being on social media, you owe it to them to hold up your end.
- **Listen to your followers** and learn what they want to see and hear from you. What are they responding to and what are they ignoring?
- **Show your workers working.** The public wants to know that we are out there doing stuff. Show them!

# Our ability to show and tell can change a narrative from negative to positive

ORIGINAL POST: As expected, extreme weather has created havoc across much of the state, leading to a number of closures including Snoqualmie, Stevens, White and Blewett passes. Conditions are so hazardous – including snow slides, trees falling and high avalanche concern – that it is too dangerous for our snowplow and avalanche control crews to be in the areas. Because of that, passes will not reopen until at least Friday and potentially not until Saturday.

Additionally, the two other east-west routes – SR 14 and Oregon's I-84, which run through the Columbia River Gorge – are closed to freight traffic, with I-84 being closed to all vehicles.

The current conditions on the passes include very heavy snowfall, near-zero visibility and falling debris like trees onto the highway. Once the snowfall lets up, the forecast calls for heavy rain, including freezing rain, which will increase avalanche danger.

Once we determine it is safe enough for our crews, there will still be significant work to do before we can reopen. This includes:

- Assessing avalanche risk and doing avalanche control work
- Plowing the roads to make them passable, including clearing trees and other debris which may have come down
- Clearing overhead signs of snow and ice
- Accessing and clearing catch basins for drainage

As you can see, all of this work is going to take quite awhile. We recognize the importance of these corridors but nothing is more important than the safety of our crews and you, the travelling public. We are actively monitoring each closure area and are prepared to move in once it is safe, but until then we encourage anyone who has plans for cross-state travel to adjust those plans for at least the next couple days.







**Mandi Johnson**

Thank you for the update, WSDOT! Hope your crew is able to stay safe, dry and warm. You're appreciated!! ❤️

[Like](#) [Reply](#) [Hide](#) 26w



**Keira Fessler**

You guys work so hard up there. I think everyone in the state can just chill for a day or two and make sure it's safe to start work.

I appreciate all you guys do!

[Like](#) [Reply](#) [Hide](#) 26w



**Sue Bartlett**

Safety is the #1 priority! Thank you for all the time, effort, and sacrifices of each WSDOT team member. You are appreciated!

🚧 Stay Safe!!! 🚧

[Like](#) [Reply](#) [Hide](#) 26w



**Anita DeMercado Stuart**

Be super careful, WSDOT people. You truly are appreciated.

[Like](#) [Reply](#) [Hide](#) 26w



**Emery C. Walters**

Those - those are roads?

[Like](#) [Reply](#) [Hide](#) 26w



**Kellie Mullen**

Crazy times up there! Stay safe and thank you for the work you do!

[Like](#) [Reply](#) [Hide](#) 26w



**Katharyn Doek**

Nothing but love for all the people working to keep us safe and clear our passes in what has already been a challenging season! Glad they are prioritizing worker safety in addition to the general public's safety. ❤️

[Like](#) [Reply](#) [Hide](#) 26w



# Still, always remember, this is social media, and it can be a hazardous place

- **Set expectations.** You will, absolutely, for sure, get negative comments. That can't be avoided.
- No, that doesn't mean what you've posted, or what you've posted about, is bad. It means you're on social media.
- There are absolutely trolls out there who provide no value to the conversation. **BUT: Not every negative comment is someone trolling.** Don't dismiss it just because it's negative. They may have a point!
- Don't let anticipated negative reactions scare you away from posting what you know is good content.
- If you've generated enough goodwill, those people will come to your defense.
- Be very, very careful about blocking people, deleting comments and otherwise stifling the ability to engage with you. It's almost always a bad idea.

# Foster a sense of community



**wsdot**

North Cascades National Park



**wsdot** On a beautiful, crisp morning, Tootsie Clark's granddaughter Jurene, holding Tootsie's famous red jacket, pushes open the gate and the SR 20 North Cascades Highway is now open for the season! Huge thanks to our crews for their fantastic work.

#wsdot #washingtonstate #cascades  
#northcascades  
#northcascadeshighway



26,567 views

MAY 10



# Show your workers working!



# So how do you get there?

- **Leadership MUST support the plan.** It's the only way engaging social media works.
- **Trust your communicators.** You hired them for a reason. Let them be creative, let them engage.
- **Keep score and show leadership the scorebook.** What is working? Why is it working? How is it working? The more you can back up what you're doing, the more freedom you'll get.
- **Be bold, take chances, trust yourself.** You won't know if something works until you try it.
- **Play to your strengths.** Are you really good at creating videos? Can you design great graphics? Is your writing top notch? Do what you do well.
- **Don't be afraid to borrow ideas.** There are a lot of great ones out there. What are other agencies doing well and can you use it?
- **Don't be discouraged!** Social media ebbs and flows. Some agencies do things better than others. Do the best you can with what you've got!



# Put yourself out there and make yourself human



Washington State DOT  
@wsdot

Waiting to get pics of the baby cow near I-5 in Marysville but sounds like someone on a horse is trying to wrangle it and this is basically what it looks like.



Athena (mind your business) @athena\_casciano · Jun 23  
Replying to @wsdot

This drawing is so hilarious I have to follow this account! 🤔😂❤️

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✨ Mk DeMar ✨ @MkDeMar · Jun 23  
Replying to @wsdot

This is gold! Thanks for posting. 🌞💛



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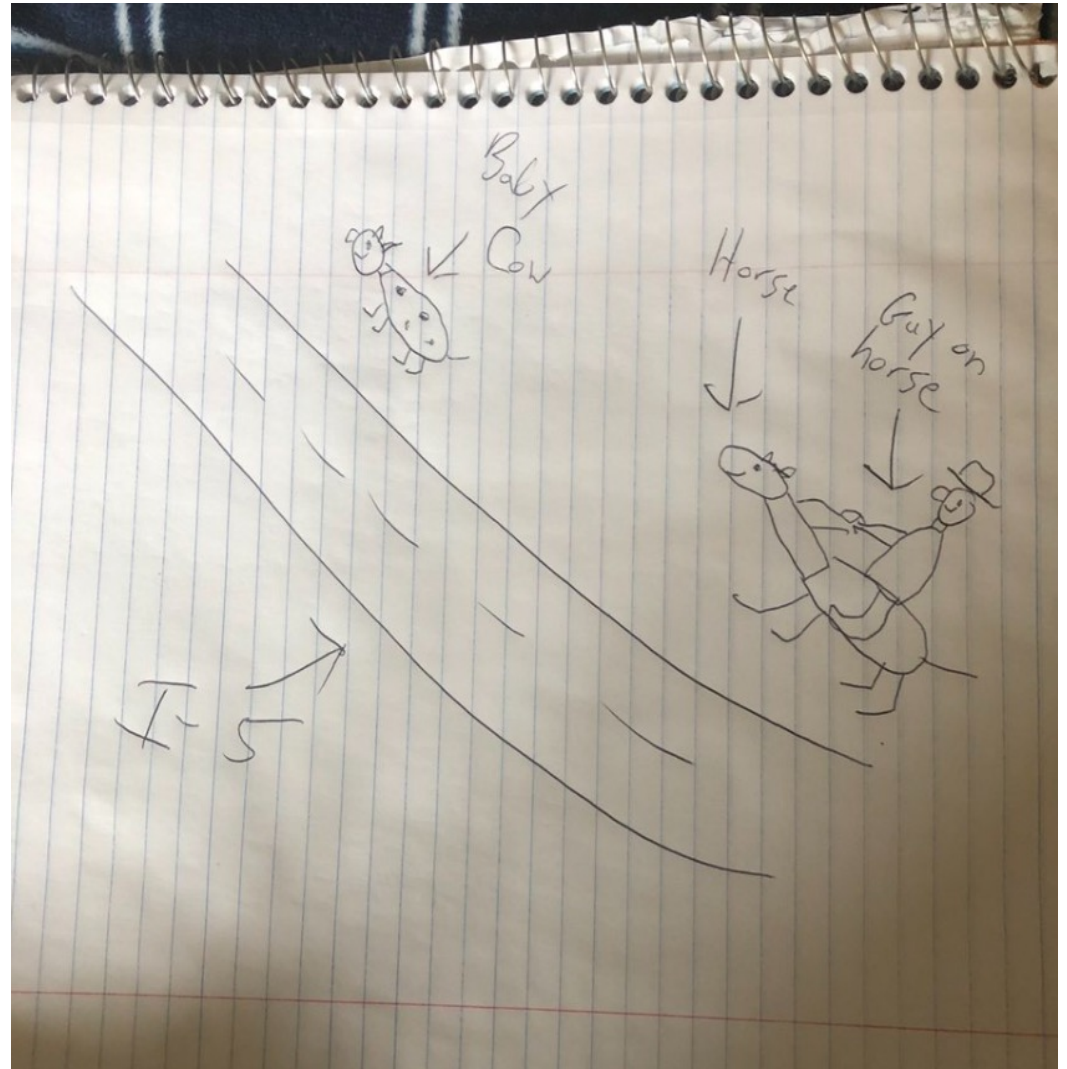
Maxx @ms0107 · Jun 22

Replying to @wsdot

Your drawing is perfect. No other would be better. 🤔😂



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# Social media at its best



Washington State DOT ✓  
@wsdot

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OK let's do some good and make magic happen. Someone reached out to let us know they found this dinosaur on the side of EB I-90 just past @SnoqualmiePass Friday. The dino wants to get back to its family. Anyone have a lead so we can help reunite it?



Washington State DOT ✓  
@wsdot

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AAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!!! We may have found the family!!!!!!!!!! Working on getting the reunion set up!!!! Stay tuned!



Washington State DOT ✓  
@wsdot

...

Sometimes, social media, you redeem yourself. Kameron's mom reached out on Facebook that he lost his dino over the weekend as they crossed I-90 & has been heartbroken. A reunion is being worked on ASAP so stay tuned! Here they are before they were separated!





Washington State DOT  @wsdot · Jun 3



**Kameron and Dino** have been reunited!!!! His mom Haley said she only saw the post because a friend shared it with her. So nice work everyone!!!!



# The bottom line

- Being authentic and real will allow you to connect with the public.
- It's absolutely vital to be prepared to be responsive on social media.
- Being creative, fun and engaging will lead more people to follow you. Those people – who may not otherwise have followed you – will now be getting important information from you.
- You will have to deal with plenty of negativity. That's the trade off. Keep it in perspective.
- Being engaging and responsive, showing your workers working and humanizing your agency helps to build good will. This pays off when the going gets rough.
- Social media is tricky, challenging and takes time to develop, but when done well, there is no better way to consistently connect with your constituents.



Questions, comments, feedback?

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