

Friends Forward



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New Media



National Wildlife Refuge System
www.fws.gov/refuges



The Rise of Social Media

By Brad Phillips

In spring 2009, Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* closed down, and *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* went Web-only. The *Ann-Arbor News* closed in July 2009. In total, at least 120 newspapers in the United States have shut down since January 2008.

According to a source quoted in a CNN.com article, the nation's print newspapers will disappear by 2015. The author of "The Vanishing Newspaper," Philip Meyer, is a bit more optimistic with his prediction that the final copy of the final newspaper will be delivered in 2043.

Either way, newspapers are in trouble – and organizations intent on carrying their message to the public can no longer rely on them for reaching the same mass audiences they once did. Whether we're ready or not, the "new school" of social media will soon be the primary way people receive information.

That means that organizations need to Twitter. And get on Facebook. And upload videos to YouTube. And issue multimedia press releases instead of standard text-only releases.

The majority of people I speak with lament the fact that "real reporting" is taking a back seat to blog posts and Facebook. They have a valid point. But they're also missing an important point.

Communications is primarily about reaching your target audience with relevant information and persuading people to take your desired action.

In days of yore, this was accomplished with cave drawings, town criers and brilliant orators. Later, newspapers, radio and television did the trick. Today, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are picking up the slack.

Twitter, the social networking site with more than 106 million accounts worldwide, is held with particular scorn by most of my dinner companions. "How can anyone communicate something meaningful in 140 characters?" some ask, scorn dripping from their voices.

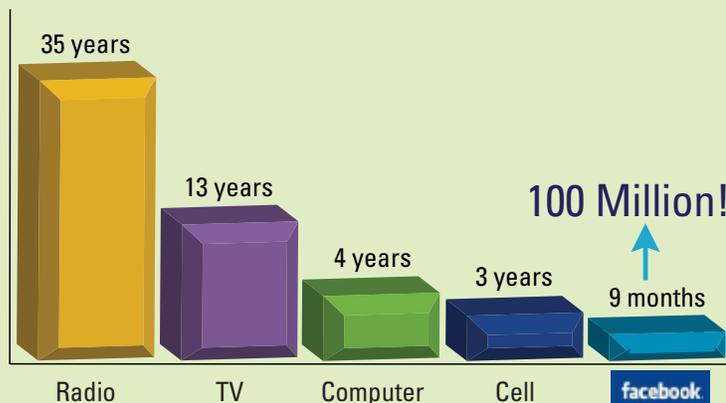
Consider Twitter's reach – and you'll see that it's worth your time to learn how to communicate through it.

And Facebook – having hit a circulation of 500 million people worldwide. That should be worth your time.

Here's the bottom line: although the medium may change, your ability to touch your audience doesn't have to.

Sign up for a Facebook and Twitter account, and spend a few minutes each week learning to navigate their Web sites. They're easier than you might think. You may love them or hate them; find them delightful or a sign of the apocalypse. Either way, you need them to reach your audience. 

Time to Reach 50 Million People



Web: It's Where You Start

By Karen Leggett

Your Friends Web site is your online visitor center – where you introduce people to your refuge and let them know who you are, what you do, and how they can participate. Whatever social medium you use online – especially Twitter and Facebook – encourages people to come to your online visitor center.

“I never knew how much a Web site could enhance the work we do,” said Jean Diehl, education chair of the Friends of Heinz Wildlife Refuge, PA. A first-ever Groundhog Day celebration brought 300 visitors in mid-winter, and Diehl is convinced that Internet publicity gets some of the credit. The site was designed by a volunteer eager to donate computer skills.

Here are some key questions to consider regarding your Web presence:

What Resources Can Help?

Friends of South Texas Refuges (www.friendsofsouthtexasrefuges.org/) partnered with the Alamo Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corporation, which paid \$11,000 to design the Friends Web site; the Friends pay the annual hosting fee and provide links to sponsors on the site.

“Our Web site gives the city another way to promote something that makes Alamo a wonderful place to visit,” says Nancy Brown, the refuge’s public outreach specialist.

Other alternatives:

- ◆ Identify high school or community college students who can help. They may need community service hours or job experience.
- ◆ Two sites – www.grassroots.org and www.taprootfoundation.org – match nonprofit organizations with volunteers. Perhaps there is a volunteer in your own ranks.

- ◆ Check out the resources at www.techsoup.org.

What Content Might Interest your Audience?

- ◆ News of refuge and Friends projects
- ◆ Calendar of events
- ◆ Links to the refuge, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook
- ◆ Current and past issues of newsletter and place where people can sign up to receive it
- ◆ Lots of photos
- ◆ Membership application and donation form that can be completed and submitted online
- ◆ *Friends Newswire* – this collection of articles is sent periodically by the Refuge System Washington Office; Friends of Red River National Wildlife Refuge, LA, includes all the stories in a rolling column on its home page.

Neal McLain with Friends of the Brazoria Wildlife Refuges created a separate Web site for the refuge’s annual migration celebration – www.migrationcelebration.org. “We also registered migrationcelebration.com and it’s a good thing we did because the .com address was inadvertently put on a large order of printed flyers.”

The most popular page on the Friends of Southwest Texas Refuges site is Adopt-an-Ocelot. The Friends *Viva the Ocelot!* Facebook page drives traffic to the Web site. Five Friends share the responsibility of answering e-mails and thanking donors.

Keep your pages simple. Empty space can be refreshing. Make sure your site easy to use, visually appealing and current. ↗



Friends of South Texas Refuges partnered with the Alamo Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corporation to produce this Web site.

Going Paperless: Newsletters Go Electronic

By Kendall Slee

While visiting the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge may be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, people from around the country and world have joined Friends of Midway Atoll to support the refuge. “The Friends of Midway Atoll’s (FOMA) only way to keep our members involved is through our quarterly newsletter, since none of them lives permanently on Midway,” said Darlene Moegerle, president of FOMA.

Increasingly, the FOMA newsletter is delivered by e-mail, as a PDF file in full color. Those who still receive the black-and-white print version in the mail will see a message urging them to save energy, paper and postage by switching to the electronic version.

Making the Switch

FOMA is one of a number of Friends groups working to convert their newsletters from print to e-mail.



Friends of Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge sends an electronic newsletter to members nationwide, some of whom may only actually visit Midway during the annual count of Laysan albatross. (Roy Lowe)

Friends of Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, TX, built an e-mail list by asking members to switch to the electronic newsletter and inviting people attending refuge programs or the refuge visitor center to sign up. The low cost of e-mail allowed the Friends to reach a wider audience and redefine the newsletter as an outreach tool rather than a benefit of membership, said communications chair Sue Malnory.

Now only 30 members receive the newsletter by mail, while the newsletter goes out to about 800 people by e-mail. The group recently began using Vertical Response, a commercial service. With this, they can e-mail a link to the newsletter on their Web site instead of sending it as an attachment, and the service reports on how many subscribers open their e-mail and click through to the newsletter. (This is more difficult to track when e-mailing newsletters without such a service.)

Vertical Response, plus many of its competitors like MailChimp.com,

Yesmail.com and ConstantContact.com, also provide recipients with a link to unsubscribe from the e-mail. It is very important to let recipients opt out of the e-mail list under the federal “Can-Spam” law that protects people from unwanted e-mail. (Review the law at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/business/e-commerce/bus61.shtm.)

Writing for E-Mail

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society, FL, and Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, MD, send e-mail bulletins with photos and formatting directly embedded in the e-mail through the service Constant Contact. These brief bulletins keep members up to date on news and events in between quarterly print newsletters, which still go out by mail.

“The Friends of Blackwater originally had a text-only e-mail that I wrote,” said Friends webmaster Lisa Mayo. “But we knew we could get a lot more out of the newsletter if we went to the HTML format because it would be more attractive and look more like a Web page.” She recommended Constant Contact to the board because it has “excellent templates that work well” with a wide variety of e-mail services.

“Constant Contact also helps us manage our mailing list with things like an opt-in (where someone has to respond to an e-mail before being added to our list),” she added.

Mayo recommends keeping e-mail bulletins brief, and including small, eye-catching photos. “Include links to your main Web site or your social media sites, since part of the purpose is to drive traffic to your other online content,” she suggested. 

How to Create a Facebook Page

By Kendall Slee

If you haven't already taken the plunge, you or a volunteer will need to set up a personal page on Facebook.com before you can develop a page for your organization. (Just fill in the sign-up form on Facebook's homepage.)

Facebook has been criticized for confusing privacy procedures. For a full explanation on how to control your privacy settings, go to www.facebook.com/privacy/explanation.php.

Which Type of Page?

To give your organization a Facebook presence, go to facebook.com/pages, and click "Create Page" in upper right. Opt for the "official page" and mark that it's for an organization. Avoid the "community page" because it does not allow your group to control content.

Your organization's mission statement should help you describe your group.

Another option is to create a "group page," which will have members, rather than a list of people (or fans) who have said that they "like" the page. Friends of Sherburne Refuge originally had created a group page. In May, Sue Hix, the group's vice president, asked members to migrate to an official page. Since then, the Friends have gotten much more participation. "The group page required that you 'join,'" noted Hix. "That sounded like more of a



Mary "Karlie" Carlson captured this image of a rose breasted grosbeak on Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, MN, and shared it on the Friends of Sherburne Facebook page.

commitment than most Facebook users want to make."

Official pages provide different features. Unlike the Facebook groups, official pages are searchable by Internet browsers. Page administrators also get a weekly e-mail outlining results, the number of new members and the number of interactions.

An official page also has features such as a "like box" that can be inserted on a Web site. The box shows Facebook posts from page administrators, helping drive more traffic to the Facebook page. The Friends of Sherburne's Web site invites visitors to their Facebook page with a link, and allows them to click on a "like" button right from the Web site. (See www.exploresherburne.org.) This feature should be installed by your webmaster.

Setting It Up

Upload a profile picture and fill in information about your group by clicking

"edit profile" on the left of your profile page. Your organization's mission statement should help you describe your group. Look in the leftmost column for the link to upload a photo. Upload photos by clicking on the photo tab and then "create album."

To simplify your URL – the Web address where people can find you on Facebook – go to facebook.com/username. After your page has 25 people who "like" it, you can establish a username that will be incorporated into a simplified URL. So encourage your membership to become your Facebook fans.

Promote and Nurture It

Use the “suggest to friends” link under your group’s profile picture to spread the word to your personal Facebook friends. Ask others to do the same. Promote the Facebook page through your organization’s newsletter and Web site.

Post fresh information at least weekly. This could include upcoming events and celebrations, program highlights, great wildlife watching opportunities, ways to volunteer and especially photos. You can even post links to YouTube videos.

Remember, Facebook is a place for conversation. So create informal “surveys” by asking people their favorite place on the refuge, their favorite outdoor experience, or their best memory of a sunrise, to name just a few.

Respond to other people’s posts. The more conversation, the more interesting the page – and the more it will develop a community feel. 🦋



Cindy Rader Heffley

Friends of Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges, NC, has an active Facebook page with multiple photos. The caption for this tram tour photo was informative and enticing: “Although we didn’t see any bear, we saw a bunch of turkeys, ibis, herons, and lots of dragonflies! We had toddlers and grandmothers – and some folks from France! Next tram tour is Thursday from 1:30-3:30. Come on out for a wild adventure!”

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Reaches Facebook Fans

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ramped up its “new media” communications to reach people concerned about natural resource impacts from the BP oil spill. The Service converted its pilot Facebook page into an official page in April. The page, www.facebook.com/usfws, attracted thousands of fans within just a few months.

While the oil spill has been a hot topic for months, the Facebook page also covers a range of subjects. Recent posts include a time-lapse video of an estuary restoration at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge in Washington; a discussion of favorite outdoor memories; and a YouTube video about President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors initiative.

“On Facebook, you get audiences and individuals who have taken such an interest in your agency that they seek you out,” says Michael Davidson, the new media specialist who manages the Service’s page. Davidson updates the page at least daily, and encourages discussion among Facebook fans. He also recommends posting photos and video as often as possible.

The Refuge System launched its own Facebook page in late August at www.facebook.com/USFWSRefuges.

A-Twitter Over 140 Characters

By Andy Smith

Suddenly, it seems, everyone is a-twitter over Twitter.

Founded in 2006, Twitter (www.Twitter.com) is a free message-sharing system that enables you to let a broad audience of followers know what is happening in your Friends organization. Because messages, or “tweets,” are limited to 140 characters, Twitter is often called micro-blogging – combining the immediacy of a blog with the brevity of a text message.

But don’t let a tweet’s brevity fool you: Think of Twitter as a method to distill your most important information and then release it to a dedicated group of people. In April, Twitter had more than 106 million accounts worldwide.

Corporations have already found it useful to convey information, share a Web link, or even organize a meeting. Discount airline JetBlue, for instance, has more than a million followers and broadcasts new flight deals and travel tips.

Twitter cuts far and wide: Approximately 55 percent of Twitter users are female; 38 percent are older than 35. There is an almost even split between users with and without a college degree.

Early in his administration, President Barack Obama issued a call for federal government agencies to use new technologies to engage the public. Michael Davidson, new media specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, believes Twitter is ideal. “It’s a fast medium that allows us to easily disseminate lots of information to lots of people,” said Davidson, who manages the Service’s main account (@USFWSHQ). “We’re able to tweet out information about a variety of topics – everything from upcoming events to links to articles about some of our projects.”

As of August 1, the Service had launched nine accounts, including one in the fire program and one for the National Wildlife Refuge System (@USFWSRefuges).

“Our Twitter account will be great to help us publicize when and why we undertake controlled burnings,” says Karen Miranda Gleason, national fire outreach coordinator. “In order to safely carry out controlled burns, a multitude of factors has to be in place – especially the weather. As a result, the alerts go out on very short notice. A Twitter following will help us spread that information.”

Steps to Create, Maintain an Account

- ◆ Go to <http://twitter.com/>; click on the yellow button labeled “Sign Up.” Enter some basic information about your organization and select a username for your account.
- ◆ Your username or Twitter handle is how everyone following you will identify you, so pick something clear and recognizable. Twitter does a good job of walking you through subsequent steps – including notifying other Twitter accounts that you have joined. Twitter usernames are preceded by the “@” symbol.
- ◆ 140 characters may seem limiting. In fact, it presents an advantage because it forces you to summarize your message to its most essential.
- ◆ Don’t waste Tweet space with long URLs. Free Web sites – <http://bit.ly/> and – <http://tiny.cc/> – can shorten your links.
- ◆ Post new tweets regularly – aim for twice a day. At Web sites like www.hootsuite.com or www.tweetdeck.com, you can write and schedule tweets in advance without going to your Twitter page everyday.
- ◆ Use keywords (birds, wildlife, outdoors, your city) to search for organizations and individuals with similar interests. Follow their Twitter accounts and when it’s appropriate “retweet” their messages to your followers.

You’re on your way to building a Twitter community and reaching new audiences for your Friends group and your refuge.



The Norwalk Seaport Association (Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge, CT) uses Twitter to promote special events. The tweet provides a link to the Association’s Facebook page, which has space for more information, including this flier.

The Personal Touch of Blogging

By Kendall Slee

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, with three separate units that include multiple parcels of land and a barrier island, may seem disjointed to the first-time visitor. “In some ways, we are the unknown refuge,” said John King, a board member of the Friends of Cape May National Wildlife Refuge. “There’s no one central place to visit.”

While the refuge Web site lists trails on the different units, King, with the encouragement of Friends board president Shawn Lockyear, took it upon himself to illuminate the refuge further by writing a blog for the Friends group. The blog is housed on the Friends’ Web site, www.friendsofcapemayrefuge.org, and was created through Weebly.com, a free Web site and blog creation tool.

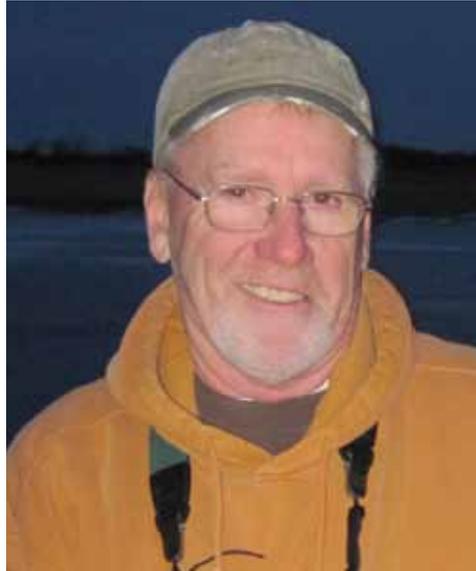
King’s blog, titled “Wings and Things,”

You don’t have to write a blog to be a part of the “blogosphere.”

describes some of his outings: counting piping plover for the refuge biologist, watching an American oystercatcher nest on the refuge, wading thigh-deep into a vernal pond. (To view it, go to www.friendsofcapemayrefuge.org/wings-n-things.html.)

Blogging Boom

Blogs, short for “Web logs,” are usually brief, dated text entries about a specified topic. Photos are often included, and sometimes video. Blogs can be integrated as part of a Web site, or housed on a blog site such as blogger.com. Some blogs feature subscriptions,



Friends of Cape May board member John King writes a blog about the refuge that is posted on the Friends’ Web site.

so people can sign up to receive blog updates by e-mail.

King is far from alone when it comes to blogging. In its 2009 report, “State of the Blogosphere,” the blogging center Technorati.com reported that it had indexed more than 133 million blogs since 2002.

Why Do So Many People Blog?

The reasons range from marketing and developing a reputation in an area of expertise, to the sheer joy of writing about an interest. For King, it’s been a way to get to know the refuge even better and to connect with other refuge enthusiasts. “Writing is not necessarily easy for me, but it’s a satisfying feeling when readers make positive comments about my blog,” he said. “I’ve used the blog as a reason to explore some parts of the refuge that even I had never visited.”

Other Friends groups blog as well. The Friends of Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge in Texas has rotating authors contribute to its blog at

friendsofhagermannwr.blogspot.com. Volunteerism and stewardship on public lands is the main theme of Friends of Nevada Wilderness’ blog at nevadawild.blogspot.com. Photos of stewardship projects abound, and the blog occasionally recognizes outstanding volunteers. The group’s other blog at volunteer4wild.blogspot.com focuses on volunteer opportunities on public lands in southern Nevada.

Join the Conversation

You don’t have to write a blog to be a part of the “blogosphere.” Most blogs invite readers to leave comments; joining the conversation can be a good way to spread the word about your Friends group, or weigh in on public discussions about wildlife and natural resources. BlogScope.com tracks more than 40 million blogs. Technorati.com follows a wide range of blogs, and ranks them by topic. Both sites allow you to search for key words in blogs – and so find just the right audience for your refuge’s news and events.

Sign up for Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts) to get news, blog and Web updates about keywords of your choice. This is another way to follow – and join – the buzz about your favorite wildlife species or national wildlife refuge. 

Networking Online and On the Ground

By Kendall Slee

Those of us who think news should come rolled up in paper and delivered to our doorsteps are a minority. The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that more Americans get their news from the Internet than from newspapers or radio, and three-fourths say they hear news via e-mail or updates on social media sites.

“We announce upcoming events on refuges on Twitter,” said Alexa Marcigliano, the new media specialist for the Northeast region. “We also have links to external news sources covering items related to the Service. We have links to Service news releases and to the photo of the week on our Flickr page.” She and other regional new media specialists suggest that Friends groups pass news and events through their wildlife refuge to the regional offices and the Refuge System Branch of Communications (contact Martha_Nudel@fws.gov) to tweet.

YouTube Galore

Videos from the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge’s eagle camera on an eagle’s nest are a popular subject on Friends of Blackwater Refuge’s YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/BlackwaterRefuge). At YouTube.com, you can sign up for a free account for your group. More and more, YouTube videos are embedded into Facebook or on regular Web sites like www.ridgefieldfriends.org (Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, WA), which shows a scenic video of birds on the refuge.

Photos and More

Flickr and Picassa are also great for letting photographers share their national wildlife refuge photos. See photos from Friends of Noxubee NWR at www.Flickr.com/groups/noxubee/ or the



Photographer Julianna Persons posted her photo on the Flickr group site for Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, MS.

Friends of Nevada Wilderness albums of volunteer outings at picasaweb.google.com/LVWilderness.

Flickr has the added benefit of a discussion area. The Service recently took advantage of a mapping feature on Flickr, where people could post photos and then pinpoint them on a map on its “Let’s Go Outside” Flickr page (www.Flickr.com/groups/letsgooutside).

Eric Reuter, a member of the Friends of Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, NJ, invited photographers who use the Forsythe Flickr site to also join a site on Meetup.com — a Web tool to help people with common interests schedule get-togethers. The informal group holds monthly “meetups” on the refuge — an example of how social networking online can support and enhance face-to-face connections and on-the-ground efforts. 

FriendsForward

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