



The End of Email?



In just one generation, email has become a ubiquitous communications tool. Nonprofit and government professionals bemoan email and the incredible amount of time they must spend reading and responding to it, but we also can't imagine how work ever got done without it.

We are so professionally dependent on email now that, in a recent survey, **88% of**

nonprofit staff said that email and websites are their most important communications tools. The survey, conducted by the Case Foundation and Social Media for Nonprofits, was designed to advance the conversation around how nonprofits use social media to engage their communities. From action alerts and event announcements to newsletters and fundraising appeals, we rely on email to get our message out to our audiences.

According to their analysis of the survey results, email may be popular among nonprofit communications staff

because we want our audiences to take real actions, like donating or attending an event. Facebook "likes" and retweets haven't yet translated into real-world actions at the same rate.

But, what if our audiences no longer get their information from email?

As more and more people depend on their smartphones for internet access, it is *possible* that social media sites and other communications apps—like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, etc.—could replace email for many users. The amazing thing about smartphones is that the possibilities are endless. New apps and technology trends pop up and disappear fast. Who knows what idea will take hold next?

And that is exactly the problem for nonprofit communications staff. According to a recent Pew Research survey of teens between 12-17 and their parents, **25% of teens already use their phone instead of other devices like desktops or laptops to go online.**

The Millennial Generation has grown up with smartphones and apps. That connection will likely remain with them as adults (unless even better technology comes along!). Therefore, savvy nonprofit communications staff need to be

prepared for the possibility that email's effectiveness may start to dwindle as other communications tools arise.

The first step is to not panic. Next, communications staff can start to explore *strategic* social media and app options to expand communications pathways. The best case scenario for nonprofits is that we are able to slowly transition our current messages into other pathways as our audience demographics shift.



Look inside for some smart tips and tricks to get started on Twitter.





OUR SERVICES IN ACTION

Bluestem Communications helps national, regional and local organizations and agencies by creating strategic communication campaigns with measurable goals, teaching them how to be better communicators, implementing whole or parts of campaigns, creating materials and providing guidance and support for coalitions.

We work within limited nonprofit and municipal budgets to help meet necessary education and outreach goals on issues like stormwater pollution. We grow coalitions and train staff members how to use best communications practices in their everyday communications work. As an **environmental nonprofit organization**, Bluestem Communications also brings our environmental and community credibility and reputation to every project we take on.

Our unique approach to communications consulting offers several multi-faceted communications services to clients and partners. Some of our services—and examples of those services in action—are listed below.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES IN ACTION: **Working with a Watershed Planning Group**

We employ an audience-centric approach that considers the specific values and beliefs of the target audience. Bluestem is wrapping up a project with the **Long Run Creek Watershed Planning Group** to develop a full education and outreach plan to incorporate into their watershed plan. In addition, we wrote messages about the importance of a healthy Long Run Creek and tested this message through a pilot project in the region.

COALITION MANAGEMENT IN ACTION: **Making Sure All Stakeholders are Heard**

Bluestem Communications has a successful history of bringing together and facilitating diverse groups with varied agendas to achieve common goals. We are currently working with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Coastal Management Program to develop and facilitate an Advisory Panel of regional experts and agency partners that will help guide the development of the agency's **Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Program**. Bluestem excels at assisting public agencies working with multiple partners and the public by delivering a clear, consistent message and providing project management services that allow for projects to not only be successful, but to embrace the principles of democratic, transparent process.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH **CAMPAIGNS IN ACTION:**

Recruiting 10,000 River Citizens

We have extensive experience creating a full range of top-quality, cost-effective materials from full exhibits and brochures to websites and environmental beer coasters. Since 2007, Bluestem has worked with the **Mississippi River Network** to create and implement a national public education and engagement campaign called *1 Mississippi*. This campaign has since recruited over 10,000 River Citizens—people who pledge to take action on behalf of the River, collected countless actions and worked closely with local partners to implement this national campaign locally.



CAPACITY BUILDING IN ACTION: **Helping Organizations Think (and Act) Strategically**

Building the communications capacity of environmental groups is a critical component of our work. We increase individual and coalition-wide communications capacity through half or full day workshops and trainings, project-based consulting hours and communications audits. Bluestem has recently worked with the **Lake County Forest Preserve District** to facilitate some strategic planning sessions designed to write and get feedback on a 100-year vision for the County and actions to turn the Vision into a reality.

Contact us to learn more about how Bluestem Communications could help your organization through any of these services.



Is Twitter Right for You?

There can be a ton of pressure for your organization to start a Twitter account. But like all social media, this is not a decision to make flippantly. Starting the account is the easy part; keeping it up-to-date, knowing what to post and when to post and analyzing your effectiveness is where it gets hard. Bluestem Communications can help you decide if social media is a good option to reach your audiences and develop a plan to do it right. Contact Rebeca Bell (rbell@bluestemcommunications.org) for more information.

TEN TIPS to Launch your Twitter Account Today

Local news stations quote Twitter followers as part of their news coverage. Celebrities announce marriages, divorces and babies on their Twitter feeds. Numbers of Twitter followers has become a barometer for success and popularity. It's no wonder nonprofit organizations feel pressure to start and maintain active Twitter accounts.

While Facebook still has more monthly active users, Twitter is currently the fastest growing social networking service, growing 44% from June 2012 to March of 2013. With 215 million monthly active users, Twitter provides a platform for potentially building a relationship with an incredible variety of people. It can be a successful pathway for communicating the work you are doing and can drive traffic to your website. And, except for staff time, Twitter provides **free marketing**. But, only if it is used right.

Here are some simple tips and tricks for getting started on Twitter:

1. **Decide why you are using Twitter** and set a tone for your communications. Identifying your intention will help you decide what information to share and who to follow. A simple

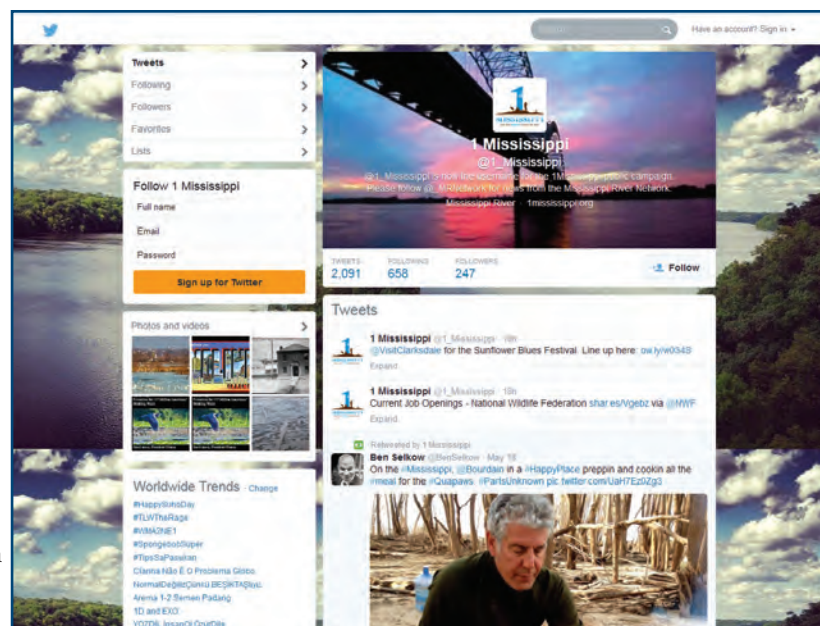
brainstorming exercise identifying adjectives describing what your tone is and what it is not will ensure everyone who Tweets on behalf of your organization follows a consistent guideline. For example, is your goal to educate parents? Recruit volunteers? Inspire homeowners to contact members of Congress on issues? Should your tone be casual or formal?

Do you tell jokes or keep it serious? Do you use first-person pronouns like "I" and "We"?

2. **When you sign up for a Twitter account**, you will be asked for a Full Name; this appears first in your Tweets in **bold** and should identify your organization as

clearly as possible. Your username is what's known as your "handle"; this is your identifier on Twitter for people to include you in their Tweets. Many handles are already taken, so it may take some creativity to find one that works for you. It should be as short as possible, while still being descriptive of your organization.

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10 TIPS

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- 3. Fill in your Profile.** Use your logo as your profile picture to help others identify you, fill out your bio and choose a header picture. This is important so followers can learn more about you and have access to your website.
- 4. Use the search bar at the top of the page to find organizations you would like to follow.** This will allow you to easily see what they Tweet. Another way to find the accounts you want to follow is by searching the groups that other people or organizations follow. Bluestem manages three Twitter accounts: @BluestemCommOrg, @_MRNetwork, @1_Mississippi and you are invited to view the accounts we follow.
- 5. Tweeting: Keep it short when possible.** Recent reports revealed Tweets shorter than 100 characters get a 17% higher engagement rate. Tweets can be a maximum of 140 characters.
- 6. Start with three to five tweets a day;** many Twitter addicts Tweet a great deal more.
- 7. Keep the 80/20 rule,** where 80% of the time you are sharing useful information, reports, other organizations and photos. Reserve 20% of the time you Tweet for promoting your work and linking to your website. This is important because no one wants to follow a group that just talks about themselves constantly!
- 8. How to Tweet:** Include other people's handles in your Tweet if you want to be sure that they see your post. This is a great way to start relationships with other groups, reporters or decision makers.
- 9. Hashtags:** Hashtags help identify Tweets on a particular topic or event. For example #CWCongress was used by Chicago Wilderness so attendees could connect with each other easily. Tweets with hashtags get more engagement than those without, but don't use more than two hashtags per Tweet or it gets confusing. Also, look to see what is trending and try to incorporate those key words into your Tweets to introduce your group into the biggest conversations happening.
- 10. Consider a social media management system like Hootsuite.** This free service allows you to schedule Tweets in advance, lists the Twitter users who re-Tweeted your posts and allows you to manage more than one account. It is still important to check Twitter in real time to capitalize on trends and stay engaged.

Building a presence on Twitter can help you build relationships with colleagues, reporters, decision makers and supporters. It is the quintessential modern way to stay in the loop and join the conversation.



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1 Mississippi is a public campaign of the Mississippi River Network, a coalition working together to protect the land, water and people of the Mississippi River region. Bluestem Communications manages the coalition and coordinates the campaign.