

Fifth Annual State DOT Social Media Survey

September 2014



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About the Survey

This is the fifth annual AASHTO survey of states' social media usage and implementation. Each June, state department of transportation communication staffs are asked to complete an online survey designed to track the adoption of social media tools, the impact of social media on the state agencies and the influence social media has had on the relationship between the transportation department and its customers. This year, 46 states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey.

Overview

The 2014 annual AASHTO social media survey reveals a continuing trend toward increasing social media adoption by state departments of transportation. In addition, the survey suggests that the use of social media tools has dramatically shifted state transportation department communication staffing responsibilities and overall public engagement strategies.

This year 46 states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey, which again asked state DOT communication teams about their social media programs, including the types of tools being used, social media measurement, staffing, agency policies and the development of mobile smartphone apps.

Only one state DOT reported not using any social media tools. Twitter remains the most popular social media tool used by 98 percent of state DOTs,

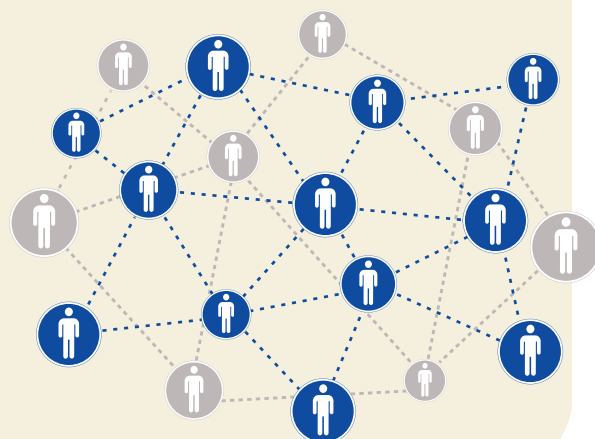
a dramatic increase from 2010 when 82 percent of survey respondents reported using the tool. Facebook use remained consistent at 89 percent.

After a downward trend for LinkedIn, the business networking site saw a slight increase in 2014 to 21 percent, still down significantly from its high of 50 percent in 2010. The biggest decline for social tools was for podcasting, which now is used by only 10 percent of state DOTs. More than 30 percent of state DOTs reported using podcasts in 2010.

State DOTs explored the use of several newer and emerging tools in the last year. Instagram, the photo- and video-sharing smartphone application, is now used by 17 percent of state DOTs and 13 percent of state DOTs report using Vine, a video-sharing application. In addition, a few state DOTs report using SoundCloud, an audio-sharing site.

"We target our safety advertising on Facebook to the biggest safe driving target demo—males 18-35. It drives our "likes" up by the thousands each time and they're a rowdy crowd, but we're reaching them! Our usage obviously peaks during weather and other major events, too. Have seen more media picking up our posts for story fodder, too."

— Survey Comment



Employee access

An increasing number of state DOTs said their agency had adopted a formal social media policy—76.5 percent in 2014, up from just 66 percent in 2012. The policies in most cases limit employee access to social media sites. Only 30 percent of state DOTs said their policies allowed for open employee access to social media sites. However, more than 90 percent of the state social media policies provided for some kind of limited access to social sites by authorized employees – most typically communications staff and managers.

The trend toward greater DOT staff expertise continued this year with more states DOTs reporting that they had dedicated staff specifically to social media outreach (44 percent), up from just 26 percent in 2012. In other states, social media responsibilities were assigned to multiple communication team members who were asked to add those duties to the existing workloads.

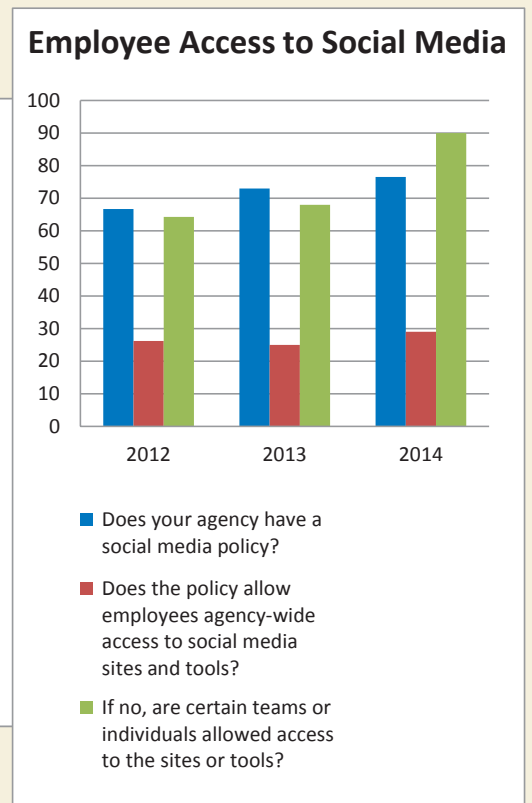
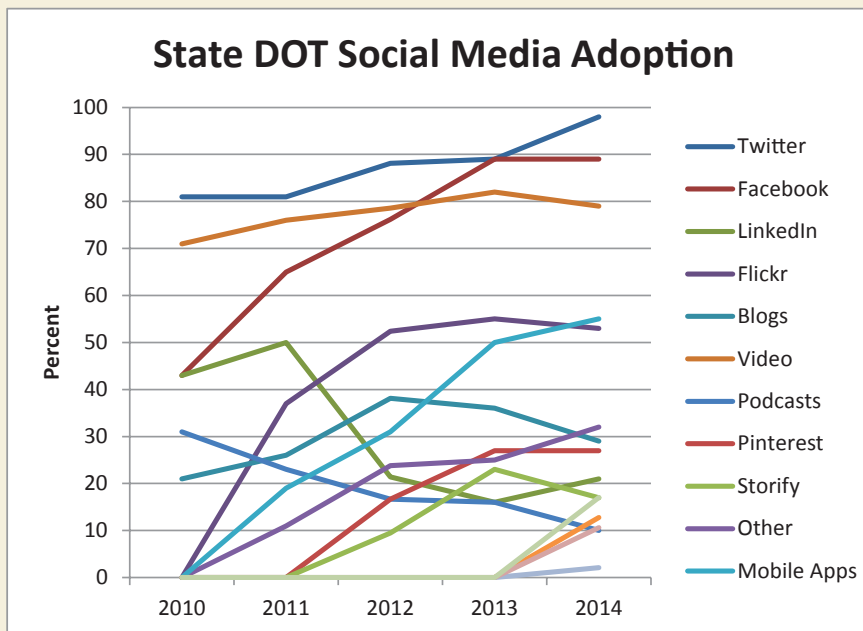
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Evolving the tools

Not surprisingly, state DOTs use of social media has matured since 2010. Unlike some early transportation social media efforts, very few agencies use automated computer systems in 2014 to update the public about road emergencies, weather events and construction work.

However, as in previous years, state DOTs still used Twitter primarily for urgent information with approximately 90 percent sharing traffic alerts and construction updates via Twitter’s 140-character message system. Facebook also was used for emergency notification and traffic updates. But Facebook was used much more for public involvement (80 percent) and overall brand building messages (80 percent).

Nearly all respondents said they experienced sharp increases in public engagement during emergencies such as major traffic incidents and widespread weather events. Several state DOTs also



reported growing audience engagement through regular Facebook and Twitter updates, even during non-emergencies.

Blogs, YouTube (video) and Flickr were in some cases used to support urgent messaging. But primarily those tools were focused on general public information and brand building. LinkedIn is almost exclusively used to share information about job openings and recruitments (90 percent).

Mobile

Mobile communications was an area of significant shift in 2014, with nearly 80 percent of state DOTs offering information in mobile-friendly formats. More than half of state DOTs (55 percent) offer a standalone mobile application, primarily for traffic and traveler information. However, mobile apps also offer safety messages (15 percent), project updates and notifications (23 percent) and general DOT in-

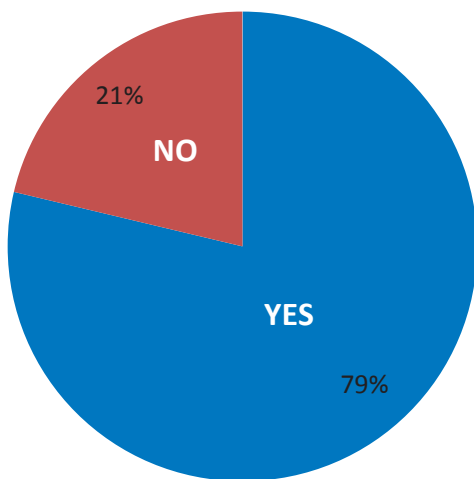
formation (34 percent). More than 1-in-4 state DOT apps are developed by in-house staff.

One survey respondent said that audiences clearly use social tools differently based on where they are and the type of device from which they are accessing the information. For instance, one state DOT reported that their mobile app drives traffic to their agency's web site. Another said, "Facebook is used by people more stationary while Twitter is used by people on-the-go."

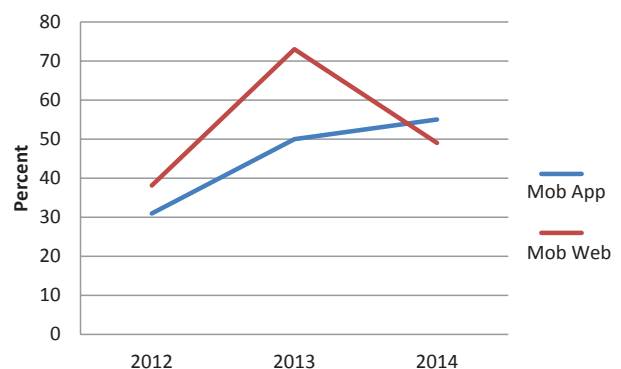
Those on-the-go customers are demanding more mobile information, according to several state DOTs.

"Web traffic has gone down for Traveler Info, we suspect, due to app launch," said one respondent, who added that "Blog traffic has almost died after launch of Facebook and Twitter."

Is your Communication Available in Mobile Formats?



What mobile media do you offer?



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— Survey Comment

Challenges

State DOTs noted a number of challenges related to social media, many of which were focused on continued organizational acceptance of the newer technologies, as well as the ways in which those technologies pressure business practices related to information sharing.

■ Internal information flows and message approvals

“Creating an internal culture that promotes data ownership so that what we deliver is accurate.”
—survey respondent

“Trying to meet our customers’ expectations in terms of timeliness with very limited staff (resources).”—survey respondent

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“We want to evaluate a platform for longevity before we invest time and resources into developing a presence on the platform.”

— Survey Comment

Social media channels typically demand more immediate response times, as well as public inquiries and media contacts that are beyond a government agency’s typical workday. That often means communication staffs experience additional pressures to provide public answers that in some cases might need organizational review.

Some state DOTs are realizing that without a full agency embrace of new media channels, information accuracy and information timeliness can suffer.

■ Staffing—resources, training

“Finding personnel to keep our social media information up to date and responding timely to constituent comments and requests.”—survey respondent

“To match our human resources with our financial and technology systems resources to provide timely and quality information and communications as warranted.”—survey respondent

Challenges

- Internal information flows and message approvals
- Staffing—resources, training
- Bias against social media that limits employee access, and limits its effectiveness as an internal communication tool
- Measurement
- Keeping up with the public expectations

Respondents also repeated a common theme identified in past AASHTO social media surveys. With the proliferation of social media sites and rapid shifts in how the public uses those sites, some question how much effort should be dedicated to exploring new tools.

■ Bias against social media that limits employee access, and limits its effectiveness as an internal communication tool

“Gaining permission to use new media tools.”—survey respondents

“Changing the culture of not being “allowed” to use social media and training employees on use of tools.”—survey respondent

Social media in many state DOTs is still considered a distraction that can lead to employee inefficiency. Many also believe that social media sites can increase security risks. For many reasons, states limit employee access.

■ Measurement

“Archiving and continued measurement.”—survey respondent

“We want to evaluate a platform for longevity before we invest time and resources into developing a presence on the platform.”—survey respondent

With a larger share of communication staff time and resources supporting social media outreach, state

DOTs see effective and affordable measurement tools to help evaluate performance and effectiveness.

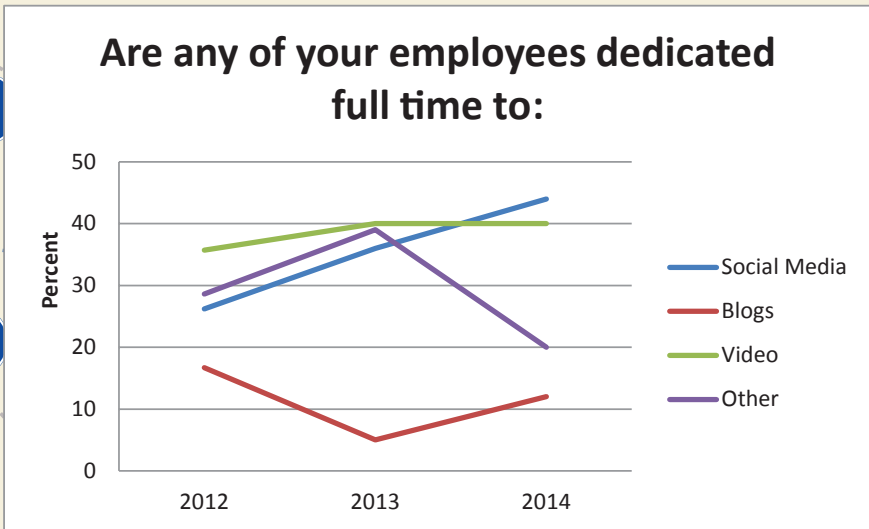
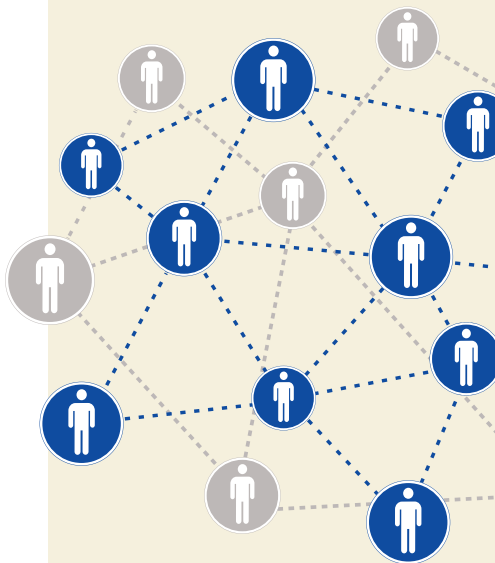
■ **Keeping up with the public expectations**

“Generating engaging content on daily basis.”—survey respondent

“Meeting expectations of responses to posts in a 24x7 social media world using resources tied to a 9-5, Mon–Fri work period.”—survey respondent

“Meeting the needs and requests of so many individuals who expect one-on-one communication through social media.”—survey respondent

The public use of social media sites often takes place when government staff is typically not in the office. Meeting public expectations for answers regardless of the time of day can be a challenge for even large staffs. But smaller communication teams report finding this expectation among the most difficult.



Looking ahead

State DOTs use of social media is maturing and in many cases their interest is more focused on how to use social media sites more effectively. The pressures to do more with fewer resources are requiring DOT communication staffs to closely track how well the various social sites are performing.

More than 70 percent of state DOTs report regularly monitoring and measuring social media sites, which is roughly the same as in 2013. However, several state DOTs said they were interested in social media monitoring and account management tools.

At least one state DOT said that instead of exploring the use of new social media tools, it was working on better integrating its existing social media offerings. But many states are, indeed, looking at new tools.

Nearly 1 in 5 state DOTs reported using Instagram in 2014. An additional three state DOTs reported considering adding Instagram to their suite of offerings in the coming year.

One state DOT said that it was investigating MindMixer, a public involvement and sharing tool. Several state DOTs said Vine was a likely new tool for their program.

“We have seen greater engagement by the public on our social media sites, and using Tweetdeck we can see notations on individual posts that tell us how people are posting. Many times it is from a mobile device.”

— Survey Comment

Know Your Social Media

The following descriptions are adapted from Potential Use of Social Media in the NEPA Process NCHRP 25-25/80 (<http://www.nepaandsocialmedia.com/>), which offers an extensive list of social media tools that are currently available for use by transportation communicators.



Twitter Social media network based on 140-character micro-blog posts



Facebook The largest social network with more than 800 million active accounts



YouTube A video-sharing website on which users can upload, view and share videos.



Instagram An online photo-sharing and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services, such as Facebook or Twitter.



Vine.co Vine is a mobile service that lets users capture and share short looping videos. Vine videos are limited to a maximum of six seconds.



Flickr An image hosting and video hosting website, web services suite, and online community.



Storify Allows users to collect, publish and share media from across the web. It allows the user to aggregate media from various resources into one location to create "stories," with each piece of media as a pseudo chapter.



Snapchat A photo messaging application with which users set a time limit for how long recipients can view their photos (up to 10 seconds), after which the messages are hidden from the recipient's device and deleted from the company's servers.



LinkedIn A social networking website for people with professional occupations. The site is used to connect and network with other professionals.



Pinterest A pinboard-style photo-sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, and hobbies.

Communication Staffs

How many people are on your communications team?

Alaska	8	Nevada	12
Arizona	60	New Hampshire . . .	2
Arkansas	10	New Jersey	3
California	57	New Mexico	8
D.C.	4	New York	3
Delaware	8	North Carolina . . .	30
Florida	31	North Dakota	7
Georgia	17	Ohio	12
Hawaii	5	Oklahoma	7
Illinois	20	Oregon	12
Indiana	10	Pennsylvania	30
Iowa	11	Rhode Island	7
Kansas	10	South Carolina . . .	10
Kentucky	17	South Dakota	1
Louisiana	8	Tennessee	11
Maine	6	Texas	90
Maryland	7	Utah	9
Massachusetts	7	Vermont	2
Michigan	15	Virginia	20
Minnesota	12	Washington	75
Mississippi	14	West Virginia	10
Missouri	18	Wisconsin	8
Montana	4	Wyoming	7
Nebraska	9	Avg. DOT	15.8

Prepared by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials with assistance from the Subcommittee on Transportation Communications (TransComm). Previous survey results are available at <http://communications.transportation.org>. For more information, contact Lloyd D. Brown, AASHTO Director of Communications, at (202) 624-5802 or via email at lbrown@aaashto.org.