7.7 Reaching Landowners via Social Media

Social media refers to a broad collection of interactive technologies and platforms that allow people to share ideas, photos, information, games, or assessments with peers. It includes blogs, social networks, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, online gaming, and sites that support collaboration and information sharing. Social media platforms allow for user-generated content and interactivity and facilitate connections and networks among users.

WHEN TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA

The use of social media in forestry is relatively new, but catching on fast. With more and more people—including rural and older people—now on social media platforms, this channel can be a useful way to keep your community connected and sustain attention on your issue. Social media is more suited to sustaining existing affiliations than creating new ones. However, if you have a truly compelling offer, advertising on social media platforms can help you reach a new audience. Similarly, truly extraordinary content may be shared by audience members, thereby expanding your reach.

PROS ▲	CONS ▼
• Social media is an inexpensive and scalable mechanism; it is good for maintaining contact with a community of interested and engaged people.	• Creating a steady stream of attention-getting content that stands out from the competition is time consuming and requires specialized expertise.
• Social media offers the opportunity for immediate, timely, and ongoing communication.	• Constantly rolling, transient "feeds" make this a relatively unreliable way to reach an audience—people may or may not see your post, depending on when they check their feed.
• It fosters peer connections, which can be an important factor in keeping people engaged and active in your program.	• Social media is most effective when it generates interaction among users. This is very difficult to initiate and sustain.
• In rare cases, advertising a compelling offer on social media or placing "shareable" compelling content can attract a host of new constituents to your network. But you will need to work hard to translate these "clicks" into sustained interest.	• Social media elicits fragmented and momentary attention. It is not a good medium for in-depth conversations or education.
	• Social media platforms are not a very targeted medium. Your social media ads and posts will probably reach many people who are not in your target audience. Conversely, it is hard to know which platforms audience members frequent or how many of them will follow you on a particular platform.

HOW TO GET GOOD RESULTS

- Social media commands shallow, fragmented attention. So keep your message short. Be clear about what you want to convey, and do that in a direct and immediate manner.

- Visually rich information is better. On social media, pictures (and videos) speak a lot louder than words.

- Use this medium as part of an integrated mix of channels in a way that plays on its strengths. For example, social media is good for inviting people to events or conveying a quick, eye-catching factoid or video that keeps people connected to your organization or issue. People who are browsing their Facebook or Twitter feeds are usually not in a frame of mind to click through to a detailed, substantive article on a particular issue.

- Meet people on the channels and platforms where they are. It is very difficult to persuade audience members to sign up to a new platform, even if that provides customized functionality or a better user experience.

METRICS TO ASSESS EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

- Number of followers—i.e., people who have given you permission to speak to them

- Cost per respondent for social media campaigns—i.e., the total cost of your ad campaign divided by the number of people who contacted you as a result of that campaign

- Overlap between your social media audience and participation in your programs—e.g., proportion of people who "follow" you online and attend workshops, request informational materials, or take other suggested actions