

SUBJECT TO DEBATE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM



PERF Annual Meeting Coverage

Pages 3 – 6

VOL. 28, NO. 3 | MAY/JUNE 2014

Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons From Boston

By Edward F. Davis III, Alejandro A. Alves and David Alan Sklansky

Following are excerpts from an article made available to PERF by the Harvard Kennedy School, Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, jointly published and funded by the National Institute of Justice. This is one in an ongoing series of papers called New Perspectives in Policing, produced by one or more members of the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety. PERF is grateful to the authors and to Christine M. Cole, the program's Executive Director, for her assistance.

The full article and the entire series are available at <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/criminaljustice/research-publications/executive-sessions>.

INTRODUCTION

The Boston Police Department (BPD) has long embraced both community policing and the use of social media. The department put its experience to good and highly visible use in April 2013 during the dramatic, rapidly developing investigation that followed the deadly explosion of two bombs at the finish line of the Boston Marathon.

BPD successfully used Twitter to keep the public informed about the status of the investigation, to calm nerves and request assistance, to correct mistaken information reported by the press, and to ask for public restraint in the tweeting of information from police scanners.

Police can learn some tips and tricks about social media from the corporate sector because businesses have already encountered some of the same challenges in this new environment that police departments are now facing. However, police departments are not corporations, businesses, or even run-of-the-mill government agencies; they have unique powers, unique responsibilities and a unique relationship to the public. Police need their own models, their own best practices, and their own discussions and philosophies about how to incorporate social media to achieve their distinct purposes.

Social media are a means of communication and conversation, which have always been at the center of policing. The promise of social media for policing is not to transform or add to the work of law enforcement, but to emphasize the deep connection with the community that has always been the focus of good police work.

More than 2,800 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. have social media accounts, and that number is growing every day. This paper focuses more on social media as a tool for engaging with the community than on the use of social media as an investigative tool, a practice that raises distinct issues pertaining to privacy and the risk of damaging public trust. The two topics overlap, though, partly because an engaged community is itself an invaluable asset in an investigation and partly because the clumsy or irresponsible use of social media as an investigative tool can do immense damage to the public's trust in and willingness to engage with the police.

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The Authors

Edward F. Davis III was the Commissioner of the Boston Police Department for seven years, retiring in November 2013 (TOP).

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE MARATHON BOMBING

At 2:49 p.m. on April 15, 2013—Patriot’s Day, a public holiday in Massachusetts—two devices detonated in quick succession near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, causing three deaths and approximately 280 injuries.

Boston police officers at the scene realized quickly that social media would play an important role in keeping the public informed about the explosions and their aftermath. En route to the scene of the bombing, Police Commissioner Davis instructed the Media Relations Office to prepare to use all forms of social media and to push accurate and complete information to the public.

In the ensuing hours, BPD used its official Twitter account to request public assistance; to keep the public and the media informed about road closures, news conferences, and police activities; to reassure the public and express sympathy to the victims and their families; and, crucially, within two hours of the explosions, to give the public accurate information about the casualty toll and the status of the investigation.

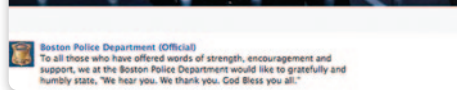
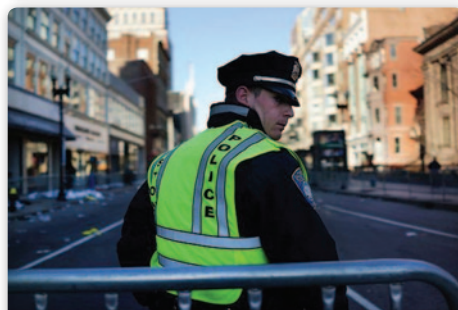
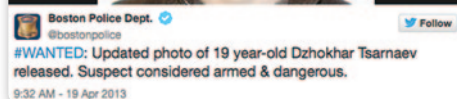
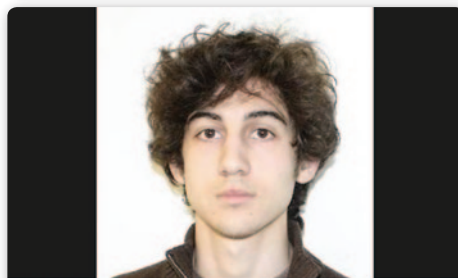
When the FBI took control of the marathon bombing investigation on the evening of April 16, BPD sent a tweet noting that fact but continued to keep the public informed via its Twitter feed and to correct erroneous reports sent by others. Shortly after sending the tweet about the FBI, BPD tweeted that three people had died from the blasts (correcting inflated fatality reports by some media sources) and that no suspect was in custody (in response to media speculation that a Saudi Arabian man had been arrested).

All of the BPD tweets about the bombings on April 15 were sent on the department’s official Twitter account, which was directly overseen by BPD’s public information bureau chief, lawyer and former television journalist Cheryl Fiandaca. Assisted by two sworn officers and three civilians, Fiandaca operated @bostonpolice as a 24-hour “digital hub” for information about the investigation over the next several days. She and her staff were briefed by commanders three to five times per day during this period. **BPD tweets rapidly became the most trusted source of information about the status of the investigation and were often retweeted hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands of times.**

FALSE LEADS AND REAL LEADS

Early in the afternoon on April 17, CNN reported that an arrest had been made in the case. Within minutes, other media outlets echoed that report. Tweets by CNN and the Associated Press containing this report were retweeted more than 5,000 times. BPD responded promptly, also through Twitter, that no arrest had been made. CNN retracted its report almost immediately, and the BPD tweet was amplified by nearly 11,000 retweets.

The following day, after photographs and videos of the scene were rapidly circulated through social media, public networks began speculating based on those images. On April 18, possibly fueled by social media discussion and image sharing,



Three Tweets sent by the Boston Police Department to inform the public about the Marathon bombing and the BPD’s investigation. Also, a Facebook message posted by the BPD thanking the public for its support.

the *New York Post* ran its “Bag Men” cover, which identified Salah Barhoum as a suspect in the case. This report was corrected later that afternoon, when the FBI released surveillance camera footage of the two individuals whom law enforcement actually considered to be suspects in the case.

The FBI made its announcement in a formal press conference; minutes later, BPD again turned to social media, releasing a series of tweets containing videos and pictures of the two suspects. These posts were retweeted thousands of times each—far more than the department’s earlier, more open-ended requests for assistance.

THE PUBLIC’S OWN INVESTIGATION

As information was being released online, both through official and unofficial channels, the social media audience was conducting its own “investigation” in parallel with law enforcement efforts.

As early as April 17 (and likely much earlier), online forums such as Reddit began independent >> continued on page 7

NYPD Develops a Fire Response Policy

At the PERF Annual Meeting on May 29 in San Francisco, New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton described a new policy the NYPD created in response to a fire that killed one officer and injured another.

Commissioner Bratton: Last month, two of my officers assigned to the housing police responded to a fire in a high-rise building. In New York City, 600,000 residents live in 20- or 30-story buildings throughout the five boroughs. Two housing police officers were on the scene 30 seconds after a call came in about the fire. They entered the building, got in an elevator, and went upstairs. They opened the door on the 13th floor and were immediately overcome with smoke and gas from the fire. The only call we received was from one of the officers saying they needed help on the 13th floor.

By the time firefighters arrived, both officers were critically injured. Officer Dennis Guerra died of smoke inhalation

We quickly did a national search for police departments' fire policies and, with the exception of Philadelphia, we could not find any major department in the country that had procedures, protocols, policies, and training for these types of incidents.

Our initial response to this incident was to give our officers instructions about being cautious when using elevators during a fire. We told them that if they were going to take an elevator, they should stop every few floors to check for smoke.

Working closely with the Fire Department, we then developed new policies that prohibit our officers from using elevators during a fire. The reasoning behind that is that once they are on that elevator, they have no ability to exit it if it stops due to electrical failure. If they encounter smoke, they are not equipped with appropriate respiratory equipment like firefighters are. They are not trained to extract themselves from elevators.




LEFT: Officer Rosa Rodriguez is released from the hospital after spending six weeks recovering from injuries sustained in a Brooklyn apartment building fire.

ABOVE: A Tweet sent by the New York Police Department honoring Officer Dennis Guerra.

several days later, and Officer Rosa Rodriguez was so badly injured that she was just released from the hospital last week. She has significant scarring of the lungs from the smoke inhalation, and it'll be months before she knows if she will be able to come back to work.

We went to review our procedures, protocol, and training after the incident, as we always do. And we found that we had none. In a city of high rises, we had no training and no significant policies to address what officers should do when they encounter a fire in a building. And as you all know, what cops do when they are the first responders on the scene of a fire is go into that building.

For all these reasons, our officers are now instructed to take the stairs during a fire, and they have a whole new set of policies and procedures to guide their response¹.

Cops perform these acts of heroism that put them at extraordinary risk every day. They are not firefighters. They don't have the equipment. So the training and protocols we give them need to instruct them how to work with the firefighters. There are still lifesaving roles that officers can perform, but they need to have better training for these situations than we as a profession have ever provided to them. 

1. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/new-nypd-fire-response-protocol-bans-elevator-article-1.1761192>

Psychological Research Has Changed How We Approach the Issue of Biased Policing

By Professor Lorie Fridell,
University of South Florida



Dr. Lorie Fridell

Dr. Fridell, former Director of Research at PERF and a national expert on bias in policing, has developed a training program called “Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP),” which is based on social psychologists’ research into the nature of human biases.

Researchers report that bias and prejudice have changed in our society. According to Professor Susan Fiske of Princeton University, “This is not your grandparents’ prejudice.” Lamentably, police agencies have been dealing with the “racial profiling” problem based on outdated notions of prejudice. It’s time to catch up with the science—to update our thinking, our discussion, and our interventions—because this is what we are supposed to do in this era of evidence-based policing.

In our grandparents’ time, bias was most likely to manifest as “explicit bias.” A racist is an example. Such a person holds conscious animus towards groups, such as African-Americans or transgendered individuals. A racist “owns” these views and may talk about them openly.

In contrast, modern bias is most likely to manifest as implicit bias. Implicit biases—such as those against gay people, women, people of color, Muslims, or homeless persons—impact on our perceptions and can impact on our behavior. They can occur below our conscious awareness. And unfortunately, implicit biases manifest even in individuals who, at the conscious level, *reject* biases, prejudices and stereotyping.

Bias starts with our automatic tendency to categorize individuals. We categorize individuals and objects to make sense of the world, which includes categorizing people we don’t know according to group membership. We then attribute to these individuals the stereotypes associated with their group. As stated above, this does not require animus; it requires only *knowledge* of the stereotype. Implicit bias, like explicit bias, can produce discriminatory actions.

MAINSTREAM RECOGNITION OF IMPLICIT BIAS

This scientific knowledge about bias has seeped out of the esoteric academic journals and into the lay literature, through books like “Blink,” “Blind Spot,” “Everyday Bias,” and “Hidden Bias.”

This concept is also finding its way into legal decisions. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, discussing the implicit bias claims associated with a gender discrimination lawsuit against Walmart, reported that the law allows discrimination claims “not only when such practices are motivated by discriminatory intent, but also when they produce discriminatory results.”

And U.S. District Court Judge Shira A. Scheindlin, when reflecting on the stop and frisk practices of the NYPD, suggested that “unconscious biases” might explain some of the police

behaviors that she deemed constitutional violations.¹

In policing, implicit bias might lead line officers to automatically perceive a “crime in the making” when they observe two young Hispanic males driving in a mostly Caucasian neighborhood. Implicit bias might cause police command staff members to decide, without any crime-relevant evidence, that a planned gathering of African-American college students bodes trouble, while a gathering of white undergraduates does not.

Moving beyond racial and ethnic biases, implicit bias might lead an officer to be consistently “over-vigilant” with males and low-income individuals and “under-vigilant” with female subjects or people of means. Where there is a motor vehicle accident with two different versions of what happened, implicit bias might lead an officer to believe the Caucasian man in the white shirt and tie driving the BMW, and to disbelieve the Hispanic man in jeans and a pick-up truck.

TRAINING CAN HELP MANAGE IMPLICIT BIAS

The bad news out of the research is that implicit biases are widespread and manifest even in well-meaning individuals. The good news comes from the large body of research that has identified how *motivated individuals* (this is where “well-meaning” comes into play) can reduce their implicit biases, or at least ensure that their implicit biases do not affect their behavior.

The modern science of bias is finding its way into the training programs of various professions, such as medicine and education. A survey described in the *Wall Street Journal* in January 2014 asked corporations with diversity programs about their bias training². Five years ago, 2 percent trained on implicit bias. Today 20 percent do so, and the estimate is that 50 percent of these corporations will provide training about implicit bias in five years.

Around the country, traditional racial-profiling training programs have not been based on science and have reflected outdated understandings about prejudice. Many such training programs have conveyed the message, “Stop being prejudiced,” with an emphasis on reducing animus toward stereotyped groups. From the science, we now know that this message is ill-suited for most individuals in modern society, including most individuals in policing, who may not have explicit prejudices.

More important, individuals receiving such messages can be offended precisely because they do not believe they are biased—producing a backlash against these efforts.

Thanks to the Justice Department’s COPS Office, the

1. *Floyd et al v. The City of New York*, Opinion and Order, 08 Civ. 1034 (SAS). U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. August 12, 2013. http://www.nylj.com/nylawyer/adgifs/decisions/scheindlin_floyd.pdf

2. “Bringing Hidden Biases Into the Light: Big Businesses Teach Staffers How ‘Unconscious Bias’ Impacts Decisions.” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 2014. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303754404579308562690896896>

Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP) training program brings the modern science of bias to policing. Five curricula target various subsets of agency personnel: command-level, senior level managers, first-line supervisors, academy recruits or patrol officers, and trainers.

In FIP training, all groups learn about the science of bias and acquire skills for reducing and managing their biases. The recruits engage in activities, including role-plays, that make it clear that policing based on stereotypes and biases is unsafe, ineffective and unjust.

Supervisors learn skills to aid them in identifying bias in their subordinates and intervening when they suspect it. With supervisors, we discuss how identifying the appropriate supervisory response to biased policing can be challenging. Not only is biased behavior very difficult to prove, but, for the officers whose biased behavior is not intentional or malicious, “disciplinary” action would be inappropriate.


Command-level personnel are introduced to the comprehensive program for producing fair and impartial policing.

They learn about state-of-the-art practices to produce fair and impartial policing in the realms of policy, training, leadership/supervision, accountability, measurement, outreach to diverse communities, and recruitment/hiring.

When the FIP trainers walk into a room (particularly with the line-level cops), the reception usually ranges somewhere between defensive and hostile. This is a natural and understandable consequence of our previous discussions of this issue in this profession—again, based on outdated notions of how bias manifests itself.

However, pretty quickly as the training proceeds, the arms unfold and the stern looks dissipate, as the participants come to understand that there is no finger pointing, no blaming, just a discussion of how our minds work and what we all need to do to reduce and manage our human biases.

This is the way we *should* be talking about the national issue of biased policing finally.

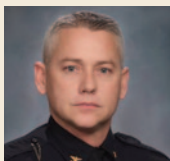
Additional information is available at www.fairandimpartialpolicing.com. 

Two PERF Members Discuss Measuring Biased Policing

At PERF's Annual Meeting in San Francisco in May, two police chiefs discussed how they have been thinking about issues of racial, ethnic, and other biases:

KALAMAZOO, MI CHIEF JEFF HADLEY: ***Research Showed We Had a Problem With Disparate-Impact Traffic Stops and Searches***

When I arrived in Kalamazoo as the police chief in 2008, the community wanted to know whether or not the department racially profiled. I thought it was a good question, so I began a process that would answer that question in a reasonable and responsible way.



We brought in an outside consulting organization, Lamberth Consulting, that had credibility in the industry. Their methodology is thorough and is respected by federal courts.

When we began, we didn't even have the necessary system in place to collect the data we needed to properly analyze this question. So we first had to build the necessary internal infrastructure, and then collect the data we needed.

After we had collected data for a full year, our consultant analyzed the data and found a significant disparate impact in our interactions with African-Americans. This was found in both our traffic stop data and in our post-stop activity data, including consent searches.

We had kept the community informed throughout this process and promised to tell them the truth when we had results. We told them that if the data showed we had issues to deal with, we would deal with them in a forthright and responsible manner.

Everyone in the community was waiting on the results, but before it came out publicly, we wanted to share the findings with our officers and key individual community leaders. You certainly don't want to release something like that publicly without letting your troops know first. But as you all know, anything that is released in-house will be in the media within hours, so we had to handle this release on a very tight timeline.

The discussion with our officers was an extremely difficult conversation to have. The officers had a tough time taking the bad news, but we reiterated that the first step to dealing with this

was coming out and telling the truth.

The Community Asks: How Can We Help?

The community handled the information very well. There were two things we heard in response: 1) You're not telling me anything I don't know; and 2) How can we help? That reaction was a tremendous relief, because we felt that we could move on with making necessary changes.

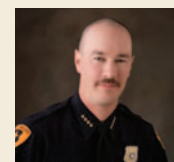
One of our key changes was to issue a consent-to-search policy which states that officers must have reasonable suspicion before they can ask for consent to search on a pedestrian stop or a traffic stop. As we all know, nothing prohibits us constitutionally from walking up to an individual and asking, “Do you mind if I take a look at what's in your pockets?” But if we don't have reasonable suspicion, there really isn't any reason for us to do that.

This change has generally been well-received by officers. There are always some who resist change, but what we're really doing here is making our department more legitimate.

We also have arranged for all of our officers to receive Fair and Impartial Policing training.

SALT LAKE CITY CHIEF CHRIS BURBANK: ***We Should Set Uniform Standards For Collecting and Analyzing Data***

I'm not an expert on this topic, but the experts say there is bias in our profession. We accept that, and we've struggled to determine what that bias is and how we can change things. The benchmark that we in the profession have traditionally used is whether the percentage of stops you make of a certain race matches up to the percentage of your population who are members of that race. The idea is that if they match, you're okay, but if they don't match, you're not okay.



It's a very simple—and inaccurate—formula. There are much more sophisticated ways of analyzing this.

What we need to do is gather all the necessary information, and make sure everyone is gathering the same information. Right now we often compare apples and oranges. One department will have a consultant collect and analyze data, and then make a comparison to another city where data was collected and analyzed by a different consultant.

If we all collect the same types of data and use the same benchmarks, we can make meaningful comparisons. This would be similar to how we all gather much of the same crime data.

PERF Announces Gary Hayes and Leadership Awards

Gary Hayes Award Recognizes Lt. Patrick Glynn For Helping to Save Lives of Heroin Users

Lieutenant-Detective Patrick Glynn of the Quincy, Massachusetts Police Department was presented with PERF's 2014 Gary Hayes Award, in recognition of his key role in equipping and training all Quincy police officers to administer naloxone to heroin overdose victims.

The Hayes Award is named for PERF's first executive director, Gary P. Hayes, who helped lead a major wave of improvements in American policing. The award was presented to Lieutenant Glynn at PERF's Annual Meeting in San Francisco.


Quincy's naloxone program has been credited with reversing more than 250 overdoses in Quincy since its inception in 2010. Dozens of police departments have followed Quincy's lead by implementing their own naloxone programs.

In the first year following the training of officers, 86 people in Quincy overdosed on opiates, but only nine of them died. Of the 77 survivors, 45 had been revived by the police using naloxone. The others received medical care from

EMTs or other persons, or were able to recover from the overdose without assistance.

By contrast, before the Quincy police began administering naloxone, Quincy had more than 90 overdose deaths in an 18-month period.

Lieutenant Glynn said, "We're in the business of saving lives. The individuals we treat through this program have a disease, and it is our place to treat them." Quincy Police Chief Paul Keenan said, "The program has saved lives and has been

great for the city of Quincy. I would urge all the chiefs in this organization to consider implementing it." 



Lieutenant-Detective Glynn addresses the PERF Town Hall Meeting in San Francisco. At left, Chief Paul Keenan. At right, PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler.

PERF Leadership Award To Be Presented To Middle East Policing Leaders


Three policing leaders from the Middle East have been chosen to receive PERF's 2014 Leadership Award for the courageous steps they have taken to work together on issues of joint concern.

Commissioner Yohanan Danino of the Israel Police, General Hazem Atallah of the Palestinian Civil Police, and Minister of the Interior Hussein Al-Majali of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan will receive the Leadership Award at PERF's Town Hall Meeting in Orlando in October.

Commissioner Danino, General Atallah, and Minister Al-Majali and their top aides held three unprecedented meetings in 2012 and 2013 to discuss a number of issues, including forensics and narcotics enforcement, increased communications, and joint efforts to reduce fatalities on a

dangerous stretch of Route 60, which crosses the region.

The summits were facilitated by Minister Al-Majali, PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler, former U.S. Senate Sergeant at Arms Terry Gainer, Philadelphia Police Commissioner and PERF President Chuck Ramsey, former Boston Commissioner

Ed Davis, former Minneapolis Chief Tim Dolan, and Las Vegas Sheriff Doug Gillespie. 



From left, General Hazem Atallah, Commissioner Yohanan Danino, and Minister Hussein Al-Majali at the first meeting in July 2012 in Jordan.

Seen at PERF's Annual Meeting...

LEFT: Chicago Superintendent Garry McCarthy

MIDDLE: PERF President Chuck Ramsey

RIGHT: Minneapolis Chief Janeé Harteau



efforts to identify the bombers, even before the FBI had singled out any images of potential suspects. These efforts were met with mixed reactions. At least one notable online news source was skeptical of the effort, and commenters worried about the possibility of racism and false information being perpetuated by Reddit users.

Reddit users ramped up their efforts after official images of unnamed suspects were released. This led to the false identification of Sunil Tripathi, whose name first surfaced on Reddit sometime on the evening of April 18 for reasons that remain unclear. The rumor that Tripathi, a college student who had been missing for about a month at that time, was suspect #2 gained energy overnight. The information was widely retweeted (including by staff and reporters at CBS, Politico and BuzzFeed and by the “hacker collective” Anonymous, whose 3 a.m. tweet on April 19 sent the name to more than one million followers). The theory about Tripathi was refuted later the same morning, first by television news reports clarifying that he was not a suspect and later when BPD released the names of the true suspects.

IDENTIFYING AND PURSUING THE TRUE SUSPECTS

At 4:02 a.m. on April 19, the BPD commissioner sent a tweet on his own Twitter account, which is distinct from the department’s account, noting that one of the two suspects had been killed and that the second was at large and dangerous. Ninety minutes later, at 5:34 a.m., the commissioner tweeted again to share a picture of the surviving suspect. At 8:24 a.m., BPD tweeted the suspect’s name: Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

As the manhunt continued, and with hundreds of thousands of individuals listening to scanner feeds online, BPD asked the media (via Twitter) not to “compromise officer safety/tactics by broadcasting live video of officers while approaching search locations.” By the time the second suspect was captured on the evening of April 19, BPD’s Twitter account had more than 300,000 followers, up from about 40,000 prior to the week’s events. The official tweet reporting the suspect’s capture was retweeted more than 140,000 times.

TWEETS FROM THE BEAT

In critical ways, BPD’s successful use of social media during the marathon bombing investigation relied on previous trust building by the department—including a longstanding, if more mundane, use of social media. BPD had operated a Twitter account under the @bostonpolice handle since 2009; all tweets were sent by designated personnel in the Media Relations Office and Operations.

In late 2011, BPD began its “Tweet from the Beat” program to connect officers directly with the department’s social media audience. The Tweet from the Beat program uses the GroupTweet application and allows authorized members of the command staff to post directly from their personal Twitter accounts to the BPD official Twitter account by using the #TweetfromtheBeat hashtag.

Whereas BPD’s social media accounts had primarily been used to broadcast more traditional police communications (crime alerts, arrests, officer commendations and safety tips), the Tweet from the Beat program allows command staff to show a more personal presence within the city of Boston. Even when posted to the @bostonpolice feed, the GroupTweet application identifies the author of the message so that subscribers to the official BPD feed still know which officer shared the message. It also allows command staff to publicize positive interactions with the community that are important but would not be picked up by traditional news outlets.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media have their own logic, norms and culture, and the police need to understand and respect the nature of social media if they are to use them effectively.


The conversation that takes place on social media ... tends to have a distinctive tone: informal, conversational, sometimes humorous and quite distinct from traditional press releases or marketing messages. Corporate messaging on social media fails when it neglects to conform to that tone. Traditional advertising and public relations often fall flat on social media, precisely because they are “not funny ... not interesting ... [and] only wants us to buy.” Police departments, with their ingrained, bureaucratic approach to public relations, can easily make a similar mistake when attempting to use social media.

On the other hand, police departments—particularly line officers—have a lot of practice talking with the public directly and informally, and the community policing movement did much to refocus attention on the importance of this kind of communication. Therefore, the tone of social media may come more naturally to the police than to corporations.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Social media are easily measured—maybe too easily. At the end of the day, a user has a concise tally of followers and retweets, fans and “likes,” views and subscribers, and total impressions made that day. It is simple to compare the numbers compiled by different departments. It can be tempting to build a social media strategy that focuses on numbers alone and that judges its success solely in terms of these numbers.

This strategy should be avoided. If social media are seen—as they should be seen—as a way for police to extend their efforts at community policing, it should be clear that simple statistics quantifying the amount of contact with the community and crudely measuring public response can tell the police only so much. Tallies of retweets, followers, views and subscribers are measures of process, not outcomes, and one of the most important lessons of community policing is to focus on outcomes—improvements in community safety, confidence and vibrancy—not simply or even primarily on process.

Ultimately, the question should not be how extensively, visibly or artfully the police use social media; the question should be how effectively the police are making use of social media, and all of the other tools at their disposal, to improve the lives of the people they serve. 



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