



Social Media 101

New guide books developed to assist beef producers with delving into blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

by Kindra Gordon

Where are most people getting their information these days? Some impressive statistics point to social media: Facebook boasts more than 500 million active users; Twitter reports 106 million active accounts, and that is increasing by 300,000 daily.

As the term “social media” implies, most of these online formats were developed for folks to socialize online with friends and family.

But more and more, social media is being used to communicate news and information about business and industry, and that means it can be a powerful and relatively inexpensive tool to keep the public informed, convey real-life experiences and address misconceptions.

Cari Rincker, a beef advocate and lawyer in New York State, says, “It’s a new age — one where more people obtain their news from social media more so than from traditional types of media such as newspapers, magazines and radio stations.”

Because of that, Rincker believes it is important for the cattle industry to have a voice in the world of social media. She notes that already a host of beef producers and beef industry organizations have created a social media presence via blogs, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, but there is still a huge social media audience that needs to be reached with positive messages from the beef industry.

To foster that effort, NCBA’s Young Producers’ Council (YPC), under the leadership of Rincker and several other beef industry advocates between the ages of 18

and 35, recently published a series of how-to guides to help individuals in the beef industry — and all of agriculture — get started with social media. The three available guides include: *How To Facebook: Guide for the Beef Industry*; *How-To-Tweet-for-Beef Guide*; and *How To Guide for Beef Bloggers*.

Why use social media?

Rincker believes there are several reasons individuals in the beef industry should use social media. Foremost is to share information.

She notes that through a blog, Twitter or Facebook, beef industry advocates can provide relevant information, add their own perspective or experience about an issue, and also link to relevant articles that may provide more information about a specific subject.

Moreover, Rincker points out that social media helps the beef industry engage in the discussion that the general public is having

about ag issues. Rincker says, “There are discussions happening online every day about the issues that affect the cattle industry. Cattle producers should have a voice in that conversation. Real change happens by trying to understand the concerns of others.”

Fellow YPC member and beef industry advocate Jessica Bussard adds, “The goal of social media is to build relationships, and formats like Facebook provide a medium that is perfect for spreading the word about farming and ranching in an affordable manner. By being able to connect easily to consumers, we have more opportunities to advocate for the beef industry.”

She continues, “While NCBA and the Young Producers’ Council can speak on behalf of its members, no message will ring truer than a direct message from its members.”

From a business standpoint, social media

CONTINUED ON PAGE 114

Guides available online

The three Social Media Guides for the Beef Industry are available online at the links below. Individuals involved in the task force to develop these guides include:

- ▶ *How-To-Tweet-For-Beef Guide* by Jena Swanson (Editor), Cari Rincker, Allen Livingston, Christopher Labbe, Sara Thissen and Holly Foster www.jdsupra.com/post/documentViewer.aspx?fid=32a09b9c-2320-46be-9cda-99ac5176419c
- ▶ *How To Facebook: Guide for the Beef Industry* by Cari Rincker (Editor), Jessica Bussard, Chelsea Good, Matt Hardecke, Katy Wunsch, Sarah Thissen, Christopher Labbe and Holly Foster www.jdsupra.com/post/documentViewer.aspx?fid=97fee10c-8bdf-4379-85e0-d109e99158a3
- ▶ *How To Guide for Beef Bloggers* by Cari Rincker (Editor), Erica Beck, Chelsea Good, Crystal Young, Sharon Breiner and Holly Foster www.jdsupra.com/post/documentViewer.aspx?fid=b0708108-e4cf-495f-a63a-01050797f02a

also offers the opportunity for networking and marketing cattle operations or agribusiness, says Rincker. Particularly, she points out, “Blogs or a Facebook presence for your business allows people to get to know you before they decide to do business with you.”

Getting started

So, are you ready to dive in? Here are a few quick tips from the new guides:

Blogging: A blog can take many forms, ranging from blogs sharing personal stories with a select group of friends to a company-oriented blog that provides public business updates. Rincker suggests that a personal blog sharing “farm or ranch life” stories can be a great way to connect with urban consumers.

To get started, decide what you want the feel of your blog to be and who your targeted readership is. Writing down your vision and some concrete goals for your blog can help guide you through the blogging process.

Blog providers such as Blogger and WordPress make it relatively simple to set up a blog presence. These sites come equipped with templates, so you can blog easily without much technical understanding.

When writing blog posts, keep in mind blogs tend to be short in length with a series of brief paragraphs. Blogs often contain pictures and links to other sites. Additionally, they tend to be conversational in tone.

Add an additional dimension to your blog through photos and/or video clips. Video footage can easily be posted through YouTube and then the link to the footage can be shared via your blog.

Spread the message about your blog by

Blogs or a Facebook presence for your business allows people to get to know you before they decide to do business with you.

sending an email blast to friends, family and customers. You can also visit other blogs and leave comments, including the address of your blog so they can visit your site, as well.

Consider adding Google Analytics to your blog. Google Analytics is a free service that will let you know how many people are visiting your blog, from where and what they are reading.

Facebook: Facebook users can set up a personal or business account and then post information, news links, personal stories or photos and business information to connect with other Facebook viewers.

Begin by setting up an account at www.facebook.com. You will fill in the necessary information, sign up and then customize your profile. This includes adding friends, your photo, profile information and your security setting, which determines if your page is open to the public or accessible only by other Facebook users who you’ve accepted as a friend or fan.

Consider the focus for your Facebook page: Is it a business page to promote your products, services and keep customers informed? Is it a page to advocate for agriculture and share real-life experiences from your farm or ranch life? Determining

the purpose for your page can help guide the type of content that you post.

Even if your Facebook presence is intended to be a social site for family and friends, consider occasionally posting comments and links on issues important to the industry. This may help inform an urban relative or friend about misconceptions they have. Commenting on other people’s Facebook page can also be an activity that helps distribute factual industry information.

Twitter: Twitter is a combination of social networking and micro-blogging that is sent via text messages. “Tweets” can be up to 140 characters long and typically provide breaking news, give links to websites, or express a personal viewpoint. Twitter can complement a blog or Facebook page by allowing you to post short Tweets that then drive traffic to new entries on your social media sites.

A Twitter account can be established at www.Twitter.com. As you set up your profile page, you must choose a username that will identify you to the universe. You can also add a photo and a short — 140 character — bio about yourself.

You can then choose to follow other Twitter users, and as you tweet, others may choose to follow you. Within the Twitter options, you can “retweet” other people’s messages to get it out to a broader audience, and you can also direct-message someone to send a tweet just to that individual.

Using the coding @username, @mention and hashtags are also methods to help distribute messages to a larger audience and attract new followers interested in the topics about which you are tweeting.

What should you write about?

If you’d like to become an advocate for ag via Twitter, Facebook or a blog, here are some ideas on topics you might write about:

- ▶ Why did you choose to get involved with agriculture?
- ▶ What experiences did you have growing up that shaped who you are today?
- ▶ What’s the best advice anyone ever gave you?
- ▶ What’s your average day look like?
- ▶ How does life on your farm or ranch vary by the season?
- ▶ Interview someone else in agriculture and feature them on your blog.
- ▶ What are your favorite sources of ag information and why?
- ▶ What organizations do you belong to and why?
- ▶ What popular advice do you disagree with and why?
- ▶ What is the hardest part of being in agriculture?
- ▶ What is the most rewarding thing about your job?
- ▶ What is your favorite memory of growing up in agriculture?
- ▶ When and why did you decide to make a living in agriculture?
- ▶ Share some of your favorite pictures.
- ▶ What do you think are the biggest misconceptions about agriculture?
- ▶ Talk about a recent book, movie, TV show, etc., that had agriculture implications.
- ▶ What do you think are the biggest issues facing agriculture today?
- ▶ What do you wish someone had told you when you first started ranching that you had to learn the hard way?
- ▶ Invite a guest blogger to do a post for you.
- ▶ What’s going on in the news today and how does it affect you.
- ▶ Share your favorite quote and why it speaks to you.
- ▶ Pick a recent article from an agriculture publication to share and tell your audience why you shared it. You can also look at recent articles in agriculture publications to find inspiration to write on a similar topic.
- ▶ Share a story about how you connected with someone removed from agriculture and taught him or her about what you do for a living.
- ▶ To encourage readers to comment on your social media posts, ask a question for them to answer.

General guidelines

If you decide to establish a social media presence, Rincker says there are a few guidelines to consider:

Most importantly, she says, realize that social media is not the one and only method for marketing or communication. Rather, it should be viewed as one more tool in the toolbox to help spread the word on what you are doing to make your operation and the industry a better place.

Always aim to bring value to your social media followers with the type of information, photos and links that you post. Strive to build positive relationships with people in and outside of the industry.

Keep in mind that on the Internet private material may not stay private as you cannot control what others copy and share with others. Therefore, be cautious in the private information you post.

If you receive negative comments, handle

them with professionalism and courtesy. You also have the option to delete negative comments that are sent to your blog, Facebook or Twitter account.

Make sure viewers can easily find your email. Some people prefer to send a private message vs. a public comment.



Editor's Note: *The Young Producers' Council has its own blog, "Cattle Call," available at: <http://ypcblog.beefusa.org/>.*