

SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

MARCH 6, 2019



(Medicine Hat Police Service, 1899)

PREPARED BY: CHRISTY POIRIER

ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY  
COMM420 ADVANCED DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

## SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN: MEDICINE HAT POLICE SERVICE

### INTRODUCTION

The Medicine Hat Police Service (MHPS) serves a community of approximately 63,000 residents in southeast Alberta. The organization employs 149 people, including police officers, community peace officers, civilian staff and contractors (Medicine Hat Police Service, 2019). The media and communications manager oversees several organizational portfolios and therefore relies on administrative assistants, Sergeants and Staff Sergeants to assist with writing and disseminating public information and media updates.

According to the MHPS 2019-2022 Strategic Business Plan (n.d.), the organization has five main priorities. The second priority is *community engagement* and includes a goal to improve “the public’s overall satisfaction rate” (p. 19), collaborating with community members in order to better serve and understand Medicine Hat’s residents. It is appreciated that investigative and organizational decisions made by the MHPS would not be discussed collaboratively with the community, but residents can weigh in on methods for sharing information and interacting with the Service. A valuable tool for the MHPS to meet this goal is the use of social media.

During an audit of the Service’s current online activity, it was discovered the organization has active accounts on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/medhatpolice/>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/medhatpolice>) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/medicinehatpoliceservice/>). Through these platforms, the transmission model of communication is used to relay breaking news, organizational announcements and investigation updates.

Although Facebook and Twitter have new posts five days a week, engagement between the MHPS and its followers is extremely low. The audit revealed most of the content is ignored, dismissed, or not seen by followers – likely due to a lack of images, proactive outreach and calls to action (Jones, 2016; O’Connor, 2017). The Service’s Twitter feed is also linked to its Facebook page, meaning many tweets are incomplete and include hyperlinks that take users out of Twitter and into a different platform. The Service’s Instagram account is currently ineffective. This is due to sporadic, disjointed posts that lack a proper narrative.

The following social media plan will outline a series of goals, objectives and tactics that – if employed by the MHPS – will significantly increase community engagement online, therefore, developing an environment for collaboration between the Service and the community it serves.

### OVERALL STRATEGY

Social media experts and academic research recommend public service organizations – and specifically, police services – leverage social media to build community, strengthen relationships and improve offline interactions between service members and the public (O’Connor, 2017; Schneider, 2016; Jones, 2016; Jackson, n.d.). It is important to note social

media activity must work in tandem with other communication plans, rather than be an isolated effort, in order to properly build relationships and achieve organizational success.

Using social media strategically, police can share information with the public without having to rely on traditional media channels. Facebook and Twitter can provide a point of contact with area residents where face-to-face interaction is unavailable. Instagram posts can help frame the image of a police service (as an organization and individual representatives) as being personable, approachable and authentic (O'Connor, 2017; Jackson, n.d.). The platform can also be used to provide timely service announcements and organizational updates.

With the above information in mind, the following goals will help the Service improve the public's overall satisfaction rate through increased community engagement and collaboration:

- Develop more interactions with Medicine Hat and area residents online
- Proactively engage community members to encourage collaboration
- Improve reputation management to be viewed as an approachable, authentic and inclusive organization
- Reduce reliance on traditional media to communicate with Medicine Hat and area residents

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- **Increase overall online engagement:** To advance the goal of developing more interactions with Medicine Hat and area residents online, engagement on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram will be increased by 100% over the next 90 days. In this case, *engagement* refers to post likes, shares, comments, retweets and replies.
- **Increase organic reach of posts:** To further advance the goal of developing more interactions with community members online, organic reach will be increased by 100% over the next 90 days.
- **Increase proactive community outreach:** To advance the goal of engaging community members to encourage collaboration, the Service will reach out to local influencers at least 25 times per month, starting within the next 90 days.
- **Increase number of Instagram followers:** To advance the goal of improving reputation management to be viewed as approachable, authentic and inclusive, Instagram followers will be increased by 100% over the next 120 days.
- **Demonstrate positive offline community engagement through quality social media content:** To further advance the goal of improving reputation management, a minimum of three quality posts will be created each week to showcase positive offline community engagement, starting within the next 60 days. In this case, *quality* refers to including a photo of the engagement activity.

- **Increase flow of information directly to community members through social media channels:** To advance the goal of reducing reliance on traditional media to communicate with Medicine Hat and area residents, the information shared on social media platforms will exceed that which is shared with traditional media outlets within the next 60 days.

## TARGETED AUDIENCE

The MHPS has a broad audience already following its social media accounts. Currently, the Service's Facebook page has more than 18,000 followers and the primary Twitter feed has more than 10,000 followers. This plan now aims to strategically reach three defined audiences to increase community engagement and collaboration.

### INFORMATION-SEEKING RESIDENTS

The first audience for this social media plan is made of Medicine Hat and area residents who actively seek information or want to stay informed about local news, community events and police activity (Smith, 2017). They are between the ages of 25-65 years, with varying levels of income and post-secondary education. These residents are active on Facebook and Twitter and participate in online discussions about what is happening around southeast Alberta and how they can get involved with initiatives and programs. They willingly share resources with others and spend time networking in order to develop a stronger sense of community.

### COMMUNITY BUILDING INFLUENCERS

The second audience for this plan is made of community building influencers. This includes individuals tied to service, professional, social and cultural organizations, as well as people considered to be local celebrities or in positions of authority. They are aged between 25-65 years, with moderate to high income and at least some post-secondary education. These influencers are comfortable speaking in public online forums and willingly offer their opinions. They include those who attend events such as Chamber of Commerce networking nights, non-profit fundraising galas and community festivals. These residents are extremely comfortable with Facebook and Twitter and are regularly active on at least one of the platforms.

### GEN Z LEADERS

The third audience for this plan consists of local Gen Z residents between the ages of 15-23 years who are considered positive leaders among their peers. They strive to achieve good grades in school, are involved with extracurricular activities and volunteer within the community. They proactively seek information and plan to attend post-secondary school, if they're not already enrolled. Career goals are important to these residents and they strive to empower others and build healthy connections with friends and other community members. These young people are active on Instagram.



## TARGETED PLATFORMS

### FACEBOOK

According to global analytics, Facebook is most favoured by people between the ages of 25-49 years, who are well educated and have a salary range between \$30,000-\$75,000. Regular users participate in social movements and online discussions and primarily reside in urban centers (Sehl, 2018; Smith & Anderson, 2018). Visually creative content (photos, images and videos that clearly tell a story without the requirement of audio) receive the most engagement (Patel, 2015; Sehl, 2018). Facebook is an appropriate platform for information-seeking residents and community building influencers.

Currently, the MHPS uses Facebook to post a daily summation of calls for service and photo radar locations, investigation notices and organizational announcements. These posts are text-based and lack visuals, therefore leaving the content ignored, dismissed, or not seen by page followers. This plan recommends the inclusion of photos, images and videos and proactive community engagement in order to develop collaboration opportunities and grow organic reach. This plan also recommends providing information directly to residents without having to rely heavily on traditional media outlets.

### TWITTER

Twitter is best used to share news, blog posts and GIFs (Tien, 2018; Lua, 2017). Most Twitter users are between the ages of 30-49 years, have some post-secondary education and also use Facebook. In 2018, approximately 46% of Twitter's users said they checked the site at least once a day (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Tien, 2018).

The MHPS has linked its Twitter feed to its Facebook page, sharing text-based updates on both platforms at the same time. This leads to incomplete tweets that include a hyperlink. If a follower wants to read the complete text, they must leave the platform and go elsewhere. Few images are included in the organization's tweets and little content is curated. These practices disengage the audience and make the feed ineffective in sharing information organically. This plan recommends curating content from local organizations/influencers, formatting posts to meet Twitter best practices, adding photos or images to most tweets, and tweeting media updates. These changes will help achieve the goals of increasing engagement, proactively engaging community members and reducing the reliance on traditional media.

### INSTAGRAM

Instagram is best used to share high-resolution images, stories and quotes and is most favoured by people aged 18-34 years (Worthy, 2018; Smith & Anderson, 2018; Patel, 2015; Bergstrom, 2018). Police have had success using the platform to share timely service announcements (i.e., snow removal tips immediately after a winter storm), and behind-the-scenes images of employees being active in the community (Cyca, 2018; Jones, 2016).

Currently, the MHPS's Instagram account features inconsistent, disjointed images of poor quality, which lack a proper narrative. This account has the smallest audience of the Service's three primary social media accounts and has little follower engagement (likes and comments). This plan recommends a strategic approach to Instagram, using the platform to engage a younger demographic (aged 15-23 years) that is considered to include young community leaders. This platform will be used to achieve the goals of improving reputation management, developing more interactions with residents and reducing the reliance on traditional media outlets to share information.

## SPECIFIC ACTIONS

### FACEBOOK

- **Add photos or images to all posts:** the use of photos and images has been ranked the most important tactic for optimizing social media content, therefore increasing engagement and organic reach (Patel, 2015).
- **Post photos of MHPS employees engaging in positive offline activities with community members:** posting photos of police officers engaging with community members increases the Service's reputation as an authentic and approachable organization instead of a faceless brand (Jones, 2016).
- **Assemble a comprehensive list of positive local influencers (individuals and organizations):** identifying local influencers who support the Values and Mission of the organization can help achieve communication goals in online and offline settings (Sorrentino, 2017).
- **Mention and tag local influencers and/or partner organizations at least twice per week:** proactively engaging local influencers develops room to collaborate with community members, and encourages individuals and/or organizations to also share the organization's messages on their own networks (Sorrentino, 2017).
- **Post information to Facebook before sending updates to media outlets:** most adults who use social media say they use Facebook and Twitter to stay updated on news. By posting content to social media first, police can control the message and increase reputation management by appearing open with community safety updates (Jackson, n.d.; Jones, 2016).
- **Embed videos on Facebook page to update community on investigations, organizational updates and community engagement opportunities:** video is the most viewed and most shared content on social platforms. Posting videos featuring MHPS members with investigation and/or organizational updates provides an authentic voice for the organization and increases engagement (Barnhart, 2019; Jackson, n.d.).

- **Paid promotional material:** As a public service agency, the MHPS does not have many needs to pay for online advertising; however, the MHPS is currently hosting a recruitment drive. This plan recommends using Facebook ads to call for applications, as the demographic of this audience matches that which the Service is seeking in candidates. The goal of the ad campaign is high frequency appearance to a defined audience, driving users to the Service's website. This campaign will run for 30 days with a budget of \$130. Facebook advertising benchmarks indicate employment opportunities average \$2.72 per click, therefore aiming for 50 clicks in 30 days (Chen, 2018; "Social media advertising," n.d.). This plan anticipates 50 clicks will lead to 25 serious considerations and 10 applications.
- **Facebook key message:** The Medicine Hat Police Service is a progressive organization, striving to strengthen relationships with Medicine Hat and area residents in order to increase public safety and build community.

## TWITTER

- **Write according to the platform and audience:** each social media platform has a unique audience and optimization best practice. To maximize engagement, tweets should be between 71-100 characters, providing a complete piece of information without forcing followers to visit another platform (unless the platform is a website) (Cyca, 2018; Jackson, 2018).
- **Add photos or images to all created content tweets:** according to *Twitter*, people are three times more likely to engage with posts that contain photos or videos ("What to tweet," n.d.)
- **Add #MHPS and #medhat to each tweet:** hashtags help index information and make organizations more discoverable – this helps residents and followers find relevant information from the MHPS (Osman, 2017).
- **Curate content from local influencers and/or partner organizations and mention creators at least five times per week:** many Twitter users check the site multiple times per day, meaning more curated content can be shared and conversations can easily be sparked with strategic partners. Posting curated content increases engagement and makes the organization appear more inclusive to an online audience (Lua, 2017; O'Connor, 2017).
- **Post media updates to Twitter before sending to traditional media outlets:** Approximately 40% of Twitter users check the platform for news updates – particularly breaking news updates (Lua, 2017). Research indicates the public primarily uses Twitter to redistribute updates shared by police (Schneider, 2016). Posting information to Twitter before sending it to media allows the MHPS to control its message and appear

more authentic and open to followers (Jones, 2016; O'Connor, 2017).

- **Key message:** The Medicine Hat Police Service is a progressive organization, striving to strengthen relationships with Medicine Hat and area residents in order to increase public safety and build community.

## INSTAGRAM

- **Create a minimum of four timely service announcements each month:** providing helpful tips at relevant times of year provides value for followers, instead of making them feel as though the organization is just broadcasting information (ie., traffic safety reminders for the first day of school or how to stay safe outside during frigid winter storms) (Jackson, n.d.).
- **Post photos of MHPS employees engaging in positive offline activities with community members:** posting photos of police officers engaging with community members increases the Service's reputation as an authentic and approachable organization instead of a faceless brand (Jones, 2016). An example of this is School Resource Officers working with students or Bylaw Officers helping residents.
- **Add a minimum of nine hashtags to each post:** hashtags make organizations more discoverable. Content-appropriate hashtags on Instagram help expose an organization to a larger audience. According to analytics, Instagram best practices recommend using nine hashtags for each post (Osman, 2017).
- **Mention/tag community partners where applicable:** proactively engaging local influencers develops room to collaborate with community members, and encourages individuals and/or organizations to also share the organization's messages on their own networks (Sorrentino, 2017).
- **Key message:** The Medicine Hat Police Service is a progressive organization, striving to build and grow new relationships with younger Medicine Hat and area residents in order to increase public safety, encourage positive leadership development and build community.

## EVALUATION

The success of this social media plan will be evaluated in three categories: Output, Outtake and Outcome.

### OUTPUT

The primary changes to be made to Facebook and Twitter include the addition of photos, images or videos, proactive engagement with positive local influencers and an increase of

information being shared on social media prior to being given to traditional media outlets. The success of this plan will rest on the amount of created content provided by the organization and the amount of energy put into connecting with partner organizations.

This plan will evaluate the number of posts created by the organization each month, the appropriateness of each post to its respective platform, and the number of posts featuring curated content from relevant sources. This plan will also evaluate the strategic use of Instagram and the creation of timely, relevant and engaging visual content showcasing the police service in positive offline activities.

#### OUTTAKE

This plan will evaluate what followers have taken from the organization based on online engagement (shares, retweets and comments) and the content of responses and follower posts. The success of proactive engagement by the organization will be measured by whether or not local influencers respond to mentions and tags, and whether or not they share MHPS content – and if so, what their messaging says.

The organization's objective to reduce reliance on traditional media will be evaluated by whether or not members of local media and general public share updates with their own networks. Of more importance, however, will be a review of the comments included in those shares or retweets.

This plan will evaluate the goal to increase the public satisfaction rate and collaboration opportunities by reviewing the types of requests received by the Service to engage with community members.

#### OUTCOME

This plan will evaluate the tangible results of the outlined objectives and tactics by reviewing analytics and the number of shares, retweets, likes and comments made on posts. The number of Instagram followers the organization has in 120 days will help evaluate the success of the Instagram strategy. The number of Facebook ad clicks, website visits and recruitment applications received will help evaluate the success of the paid advertising campaign included in this plan.

## References

- 2019-2022 strategic business plan. (n.d.). *Medicine Hat Police Service* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://www.mhps.ca/posts/post/886>
- Barnhart, B. (2019). How to build your social media marketing strategy for 2019. *Sprout Social*. Retrieved from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-marketing-strategy/>
- Chen, J. (2018). Facebook advertising cost: Everything you need to optimize your ROI. *Sprout Social*. Retrieved from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/facebook-advertising-cost/>
- Cyca, M. (2018). Stop posting the same message on social media (and do this instead). *Hootsuite*. Retrieved from <https://blog.hootsuite.com/cross-promote-social-media/>
- Goldsmith, A. (2015). Disgracebook policing: Social media and the rise of police indiscretion. *Policing and Society*, 25(3), 249-267. doi:10.1080/10439463.2013.864653
- Jackson, D. (n.d.). Social media and government: Cutting red tape for increased citizen engagement. *Sprout Social*. Retrieved from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-and-government/>
- Jackson, D. (2018). Know your limit: The ideal length of every social media post. *Sprout Social*. Retrieved from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-character-counter/>
- Jones, R. (2016). 6 ways for law enforcement to succeed on social media. *Socrata*. Retrieved from <https://socrata.com/blog/6-ways-law-enforcement-succeed-social-media/>
- Lua, A. (2017). What to post on each social media platform: The complete guide to optimizing your social content. *Entrepreneur*. Retrieved from <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/305168>
- Medicine Hat Police Service. (1899). [Medicine Hat Police Service Logo]. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine\\_Hat\\_Police\\_Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine_Hat_Police_Service)
- Medicine Hat Police Service [@medicinehatpoliceservice]. (2019, January 11). January 13th marks the 120th anniversary of the MHPS. The proud history of the Service can be traced back to 1899 when Bylaw 8 created the position of a Town Constable. This position was paid \$50/mo and issued 2 uniforms annually, and combined the suites of an Inspector, Health Officer and Policeman. Today the MHPS employees 112 police officers, 8 community peace officers, 26 civilian staff & 3 contract employees. Of the current staff the longest serving employee is Karen Eisenbarth who has been with the MHPS for 41 years! To learn more about the history of the MHPS visit [www.mhps.ca](http://www.mhps.ca) or the MHPS located in the lobby of the station (open Mon-Fri 8-4 admission is free) [#medhat](#) [#thenandnow](#) [#LESM](#) [#police](#) [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BsgvB9hlyym/>

- Mission / vision / values. (n.d.). *Medicine Hat Police Service*. Retrieved from <https://www.mhps.ca/posts/post/22>
- O'Connor, C. (2017). The police on twitter: Image management, community building, and implications for policing in Canada. *Policing & Society*, 27(8), 899-912. doi:10.1080/10439463.2015.1120731
- Osman, M. (2017). How to use hashtags on every social media network. Sprout Social. Retrieved from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/how-to-use-hashtags/?platform=hootsuite>
- Patel, N. (2015). Visual content strategy: The new 'black' for content marketers. Content Marketing Institute. Retrieved from <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/11/visual-content-strategy/>
- Schneider, C. (2016). Police presentational strategies on Twitter in Canada. *Policing and Society*, 26(2), 129-147. doi:10.1080/10439463.2014.922085
- Sehl, K. (2018). All the Facebook demographics that matter to social media marketers. Hootsuite. Retrieved from <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-demographics/>
- Smith, A. & Anderson, M. (2018). Social media use in 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>
- Smith, R. (2017). *Strategic planning for public relations: 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. New York: Routledge.
- Social media advertising & paid social guide. (n.d.) *Sprout Social*. Retrieved from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/topics/social-media-advertising/>
- Sorrentino, C. (2017). Why connecting with local influencers is crucial for small business. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2017/11/13/why-connecting-with-local-influencers-is-crucial-for-small-business/#2978594c4e2f>
- Tien, S. (2018). Top Twitter demographics that matter to social media marketers. *Hootsuite*. Retrieved from <https://blog.hootsuite.com/twitter-demographics/>
- What to tweet. (n.d.). *Twitter*. Retrieved from <https://business.twitter.com/en/basics/what-to-tweet.html>
- Worthy, P. (2018). Top Instagram demographics that matter to social media marketers. Hootsuite. Retrieved from <https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-demographics/>