Social Media Guide

for Public Schools

campus suite

Learn how to plan, create and manage a successful social media program

Social Media Guide

CONTENTS

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Introduction

Has your school district finally decided to stop running away from the social media monster? It's time to start Tweeting, following and liking and all that 'social' stuff, right?

Or perhaps your school's got it going on when it comes to social media – you have your profiles in place, you're engaging in good dialogue, but you want to be more strategic with your use of social media in your school. Either way, you owe it to yourself, your school's parents, staff, students and the entire school community to read this guide, and explore some new possibilities of what social media can do for you school.

Social media is a powerful force, continuing to grow in usage at a fast rate. No longer just the domain of teens, it's a ubiquitous communications structure that's fast becoming a main source of news and information for a growing audience. And just as sports stars, celebrities, politicians, and commerce have embraced its power, schools are beginning to find ways put social media to good use for them. Schools are learning how to reach all their audiences with social media – using it to listen, to share, to promote and change educational outcomes.

This guide applies to any school: the large urban district or the typical five-to-seven-school suburban district, both facing the challenges of parent involvement and community support; and the private or parochial school whose admissions and development teams are charged with to improving their enrollment and generating support.

We've created this *Social Media Guide for Schools* for you to get a better understanding of the importance in establishing a social media management program at your school. We'll explore the power and potential of social media in the school setting, then outline the steps for creating the mission, structure, policies and process to integrating social media into your school's communications. We've also included some resources and tools for you to use as your school embarks on its social media sojourn. We hope you find this information so helpful that you even share it with someone. Even Tweet about it, if you'd like.

About the author

Jay Cooper is the marketing manager and content strategist for Campus Suite. A former journalist and school public relations specialist, Jay's experience spans marketing and communications for industry, K-12 and higher education. He has helped businesses, schools and colleges use the power of web communications to improve their image, generate support, and optimize relationships.

Follow Jay on Twitter: @jay4schools

Why social media matters
to your school

It's becoming the preferred method to share.

The growing number of social media users is creating more and better ways to connect. If you're not down with words like: trending, hashtag and re-tweet, you'd better finish reading this section.

At last count, there were 255 million Twitter users, nearly 80% of them using it on a mobile device. Facebook, with three-fourths of its 802 million daily active users accessing their accounts via mobile phones and tablets, continues to build its user base. Just because people are on the go, doesn't stop them from sharing news and information.

According to Nielsen, the media insights watchdog, YouTube reaches more US adults ages 18-34 than any cable network, and one out of every four Americans views at least one Youtube video every day. Everyone likes videos to help learn about new things, and share stuff they like. How much school content have you posted on Youtube?

In a recent Fast Company article, Belle Beth Cooper (no relation, at least, I don't think) shares that the fastest growing demographic on Twitter is the 55-64 year age bracket. LinkedIn, the world's largest internet-based professional network has just exceeded the 300-million member mark. Imagine a LinkedIn group of your school's influential

300-million member mark. Imagine a LinkedIn group of your school's influential supporters with whom you could instantly share achievement results, school levy info, and alumni and fundraising news.

You get the point. Social media is not just a kid or grandkid thing. Social media has become the lingua franca and it ought to be part of your school's communications strategy. What's more, some say it should even be part of your school curriculum, teaching students how to use it. Your student's take-home school info packet is no longer the manilla envelope. It's right there on your phone.

Social media is underutilized by many schools.

Some school districts already use Facebook and Twitter as communication tools between parents, teachers, and students, and some even as teaching tools in the classroom. However, even those schools that *are* using social media need some help in getting their arms around it. As debate swirls over how to best incorporate social media into the school curriculum, there is also uncertainty about how to get the most out of social media to engage the entire school community. Social media can be used for more than just sharing calendar events, sports results and achievement gains. It's safe to say that we're only scratching the surface of its potential.

As a political force, there's nothing more grassroots than social media. It's the fourth estate. From U.S. presidential elections to school board contests, social media is having an impact. Hardly a spring or fall election goes by without a school levy on the ballot, and we all know that school levies are often close contests that tend to bring out motivated voters

on one side or the other. Factor social media into your school's levy campaign strategy, and you have the potential to have the vote swing your way. It's a tool that can not only sway popular opinion, but galvanize your school's supporters and strengthen your community backing.

Public schools are among those major institutions – joining banking, news, business, the courts – that are losing the public's confidence, so it's important for schools to explore modern communications strategies to regain public faith and re-establish their roles as community linchpins.

As recently as two years ago, a mere 40 school districts nationwide had a social media policy in place. That's 40 out of more than 14,000 school districts. And while more and more schools are beginning to adopt social media plans, the defensive stance some schools are taking may limit the true potential of all the positive things a sound social media management program can do for a district. School districts have the leeway and discretion to make their own social media policies, so get moving the right direction and put yours in action, before you're forced to put a plan in place that's rushed and reactionary.

Educator and blogger Mark W. Guay, author of Schools Gone Social, has a pithy quote for any educator who is hesitant to jump in to the social media world: "So, go ahead and get started. Enjoy the likes, the retweets, and the re-pins. You have nothing to lose besides progress."

Get out in front of social media, before you find yourself behind it.

Social media is best way to tell your school's story.

Taking an active role in your school's social media gives you the ability to tell everybody about all the great things happening in and around your school. Schools will forever be associated with being a cornerstone of the community, so telling your school's story – putting your best foot forward – helps position it as a community asset for educating future generations.

But much more than just telling your story, it's about listening like never before, and joining in the kind of dialogue that brings everyone closer to your school.

We all know how important listening is in the communications process. And creating better ways to listen is an important benefit of a social media program that helps strengthen the family-school-community partnership. Twenty-four hour access to every social media channel gives your teachers, school administrators and all your school's stakeholders so many chances to learn more about the issues percolating among parents and the school community.

Mariemont City Schools
May 6

Mariemont High School grad & Kiwanis International 2013 scholarship recipient stopped in to say "hello" at today's meeting. Brittney Hall is attending nursing school at Ohio University, and said "I am grateful for everything that Kiwanis has done, and I had a great year at OU, with a GPA of 3.65!"

Like · Comment · Share   📄 1

👍 30 people like this.

Jean Marie Nelson Awesome Britney!
May 7 at 11:16am · Like

Write a comment...

The ability to create online surveys in an instant, and just as instantly know where your audience stands on any number of school issues, facilitates immediacy in gauging opinion, gathering input, and simply listening better. Tools to monitor what's being said about your school – and who's saying it – creates untold opportunities to not only listen, but respond strategically with the right message.

Time was, a news release sent to the local press or a posting on the school website was the primary way to get the broadest reach for school news – create the release and hope parents and the rest of the community finds it. Post and pray. If you're real lucky and your public relations or communications manager has a good rapport with the local media, the community paper picked up the release and ran the story. Social media changes all that.

While social media best practices can do wonders to strengthen your school's media relations, it's a powerful tool in and of itself, enabling you to publish and share while maintaining the utmost of editorial control. You manage the message.

Social media is multi-faceted in that it can be used to do much more than deliver messages. It can be used to galvanize your audience and build a following in and of itself. It can also be used to drive traffic to your website – or elsewhere– through the use of embedded links, giving your audiences more chances to learn more about your school and dig deeper.

Whether you're talking in 140-character Tweets, 6-second Vine videos, Facebook pages or blog posts, all these vehicles and others can be utilized to surround your audiences with the content to get your message across. What's more, all these channels create nearly endless opportunities to start one-on-one and one-to-many dialogue.

Mariemont Schools @MariemontSchool · May 7
Read the latest #superintendent blog, Teachers Inspire, Ignite the Imagination: mariemontschools.org/about/2014/05/... @NationalPTA #TeacherAppreciationWeek

Expand   ↰ Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

Social media creates personal and responsive conversations with all your audiences – parents, staff, students and the community–and helps strengthen your school's image and place in the community.

Creating your school's social media mission

It all starts with a mission. Just as your school has a mission, your school's social media program needs one to reflect just what just you're trying to accomplish. Social engagement is far from passive, so it's important you create the anchor message that will serve to capture – in as few words as possible without sacrificing substance – the essence of your school's vision for engaging your entire school community.

Your school's social media mission statement is especially important given all the unfortunate negative connotations surrounding teacher's rights, student bullying and civil liberties in general. But these negative issues, while garnering all the publicity, represent the exception rather than the rule when it come to the social media's persuasive power. Social media is an overwhelmingly positive force in today's communications mix.

Social media's ubiquitous nature requires schools act sooner than later on setting out on

their mission to incorporate social media into the broader communications landscape. A well-tuned social media mission statement goes a long way in assuaging your district's stakeholders – the school board, staff, students, parents and the entire school community – that you're on the right track to engaging your constituents for the good of students and the community.

While developing your social media mission statement needn't be a long and tedious task, it requires the diligence to align your social media goals with those of your school or district. Typically, you're school's communications team – public relations director, even outside PR or communications counsel – should drive the creation, approval and promotion of your social media mission.

Here's an example of a social media mission statement. Feel free to use it as a starting point for your school.

"Share content and create meaningful dialogue with parents, students, staff and the community to improve communications and support the educational goals of the school."

Building the right social media structure

When you build your school or district's social media program, make sure you structure it to reflect how you want to organize and manage your social media content. For example, does each school have its own social media profile, or are you creating just district-level profiles? (I suggest the former.)

Social media is all about 'personalization' after all, so you and your school have to determine how individual schools' social media brands will be balanced with the overarching district brand, or, for example, how the football team's social media brand is depicted within the school brand. Balancing uniformity and personalization can be a tricky task, but with the right structure in place, it's easy.

Tips:
1. Define the profile hiercharchy.
2. Determine how content is to be shared across each of the profiles. (e.g., Does a district post get pushed to each school?)
3. Establish uniform branding, links and descriptions for each profile.
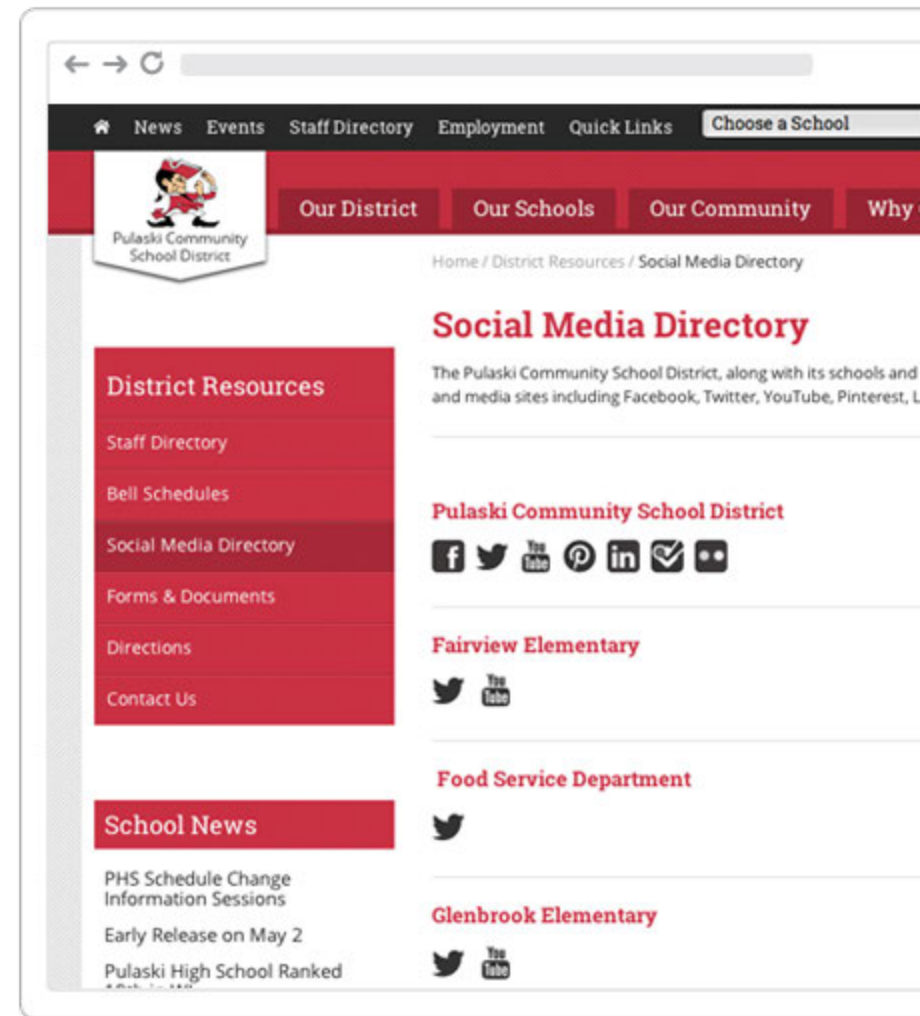
Who is in charge here?

Part of the beauty of social media is the capability for virtually anyone to contribute. But there still needs to be someone who's in charge. Naturally, your social media initiative should have the support of your superintendent, but don't saddle him or her with managing that. Whoever's running your school's social media program should be passionate and reliable.

It's a good idea to have your senior-ranking communications manager run your social media program. Be certain to stay on top of the social media landscape and strive to apply best practices to your school. Start small. Set realistic expectations, and equip yourself with the right tools and partners.

Tips:

1. Draw up an organization chart of all of the channels and who is responsible for them.
2. Set-up a "Social Media" advisory team. Include a teacher, a student, and a parent. Find champions of social media.
3. Conduct weekly/monthly meetings discussing planning and promoting content.
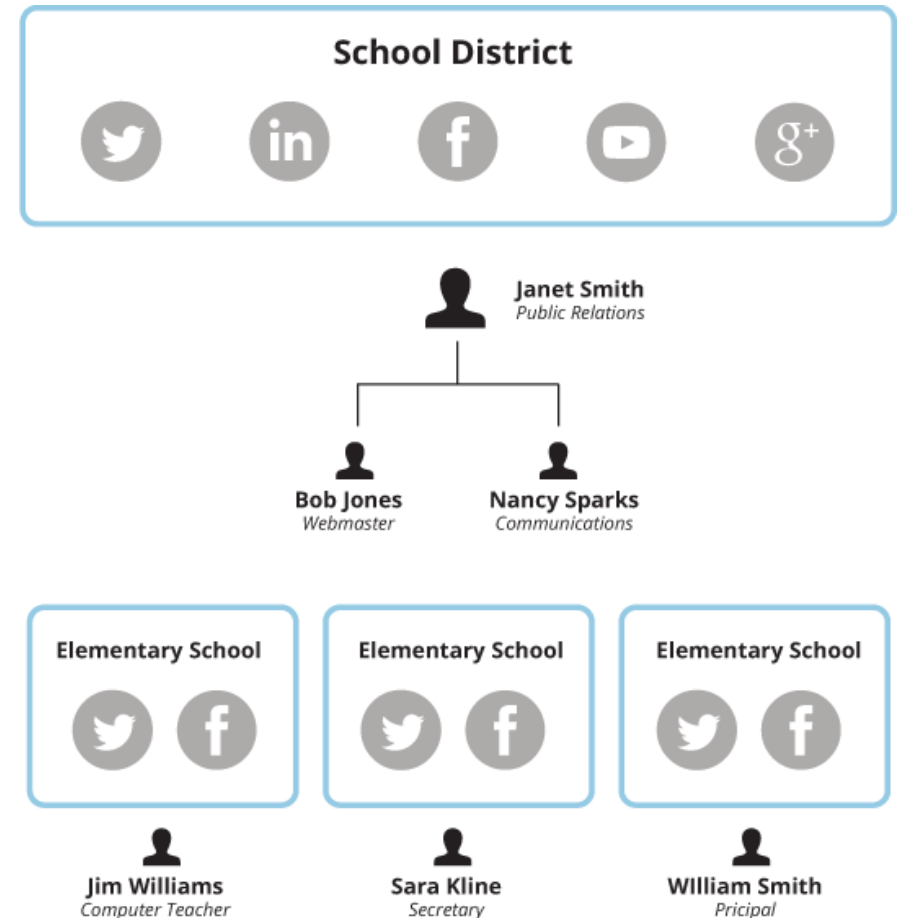
Setting up a social media policy

The first order of business for your social team is to set policy. There are so many issues surrounding privacy and acceptable use guidelines, you want to be certain you have all your ducks in a row here. When establishing your social media guidelines, look at other school policies. There's no need to reinvent the wheel here. You'll likely adapt one from an existing district with a social media policy already in place.

Make sure it's something you can live with and abide by. Be sure to run your social media policies by legal and HR to make sure you're not violating any current policies or laws. Check out the resources below for specific examples of school social media acceptable use policies.

Resources:

San Diego Unified School District Social Media Guidelines
bit.ly/1oK1dXe

This document explains guidelines of SDUSD social media use.

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Social Media Best Practices
http://bit.ly/JUdswo

Web 2.0 Classroom Sample guidelines for the promotion and use of social media products by students and staff.

Online Database of Social Media Policies
http://bit.ly/KPYOJA

Social Media Governance Preview social media policies from various industries. Be sure to check "General Guidelines and Templates" for some useful downloads.

Establishing a social media process

Depending on how far along you are in your social media planning and implementation, getting the most out of social media just may require a shift in thinking. Don't think of it as a series of random acts of "tweets and likes" or posting news to various channels. Rather, start thinking in terms of using social media as a strategic communications tool for your district.

As with any communications plan, you must have the people in place to manage it, have your target audiences well defined, and map out the kinds of content you'll be creating. There are many channels to choose from, so you'll need to determine the ones to use and plan a schedule for sharing your content. Then, because this is all about dialogue, you'll need to begin promoting all this activity, and have in place a process for interacting when it all starts getting 'social.'

Putting in place a process will help you manage the content and measure the results of your school's social media program.
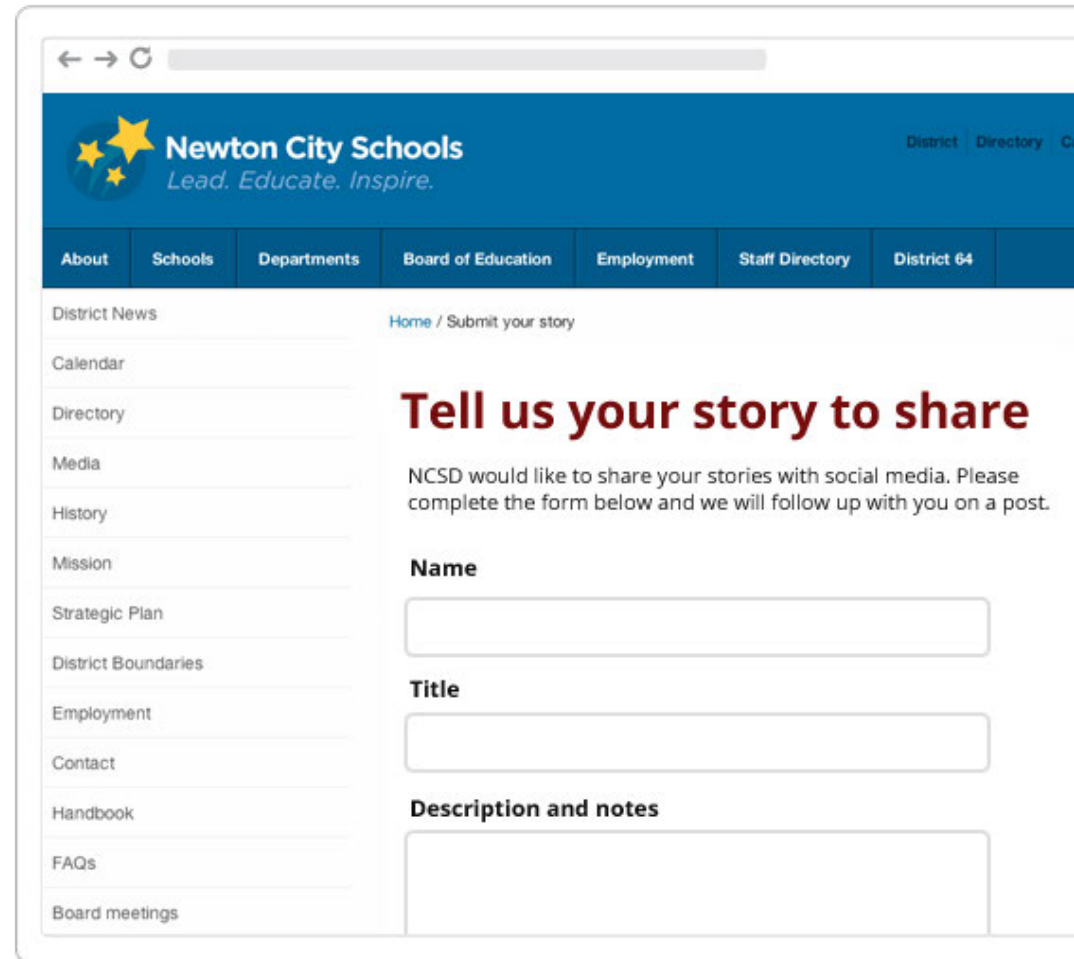
Creating content

You'll obviously still create content yourself and continue to share it via your website, school-sponsored blogs and social media channels, but you want to get others involved. One ways to gett your content engine roaring is to enlist the help of the very school community you're aiming to engage. Encourage participation by all the stakeholders in your school: parents, staff, students and community members.

 Tips:
1. Make it easy on your content creators by setting up a form on your website and invite faculty, staff, students and others to submit news for sharing.
2. When planning your content, be sure to routinely have something for each of your audience groups. (e.g., you want parents learning about teachers, and vice versa)
3. Establish topic clusters for generating stories. (e.g., teacher excellence, classroom innovation, extracurriculars, etc.)
4. Create a media release form for parents to sign, permitting photos to be posted

Scheduling your content

Scheduling your content is just as important as creating the content itself. However, before you commit to participating in one channel or another, make sure you do just that – commit. Don't neglect a channel and allow it to "gather dust" or else you run the risk of alienating those who engaged you through that channel. Frequency is key in the social media world. Arrive at a frequency you can live with, then stick to it. The last thing you want to do is disappear from the conversation.

So, how often should you post new content? While the short answer is, "not often enough," it helps to work off a schedule. There are some general rules of thumb but most of those are dictated by the amount of content writing resources your school has. Regardless of the number of contributors you have, a social media content planner is great way to keep your content organized and on schedule.

Tips:
1. Create a content planning spreadsheet that contains a schedule of all social media posts, broken down by type. (e.g., image, link, blog, etc.)
2. Include a status field to show follow-up posts.
3. Auto count the characters to ensure description fits within the required amount.
4. Schedule some time yourself (1 hour per week) planning your release schedule.

Promoting social media at every turn

Because social media is all about creating a following and building it up, you should be promoting your school's social media involvement at every turn. Begin encouraging people to follow you and share content from all your non-web school communications: e-mails, take-home materials, school signage, community cable – you name it. You can never have too many followers or too many ways to promote people to follow you.

Tips:

1. Post signs around schools and the districts.
2. Include your social media addresses on all printed material. (e.g., school plays and athletics programs)
3. Put social media on the agenda at parent orientations, parent-teacher meetings.
4. Promote it on all mailings.
5. Take inventory of all extracurricular groups and brainstorm ways to promote social media involvement.

Planning for interactivity

Once the dialogue starts, it's best to have a plan in place to both promote the good stuff and handle the not-so good stuff. Social media itself enables you to tag content and group content for your promotional benefit, and there are social media management tools that help you discover and deal with bad comments. Either way, you'll want to respond as soon as possible, but it's especially important to address negative comments and discussion quickly and directly. Be prepared by having a sound interactive process in place to address all user comments.

Tips:
1. Create hashtags by grouped content and promote them on a scheduled basis.
2. Set up authority workflows for different type of issues. (e.g., a bad comment about a teacher will automatically be brought to the principal's attention)
3. Flag certain words and subjects with 'forbidden' alerts.
4. Establish a contingency event when negative information is being spread. This can be addressed using direct responses.
5. Require approvals for any responses that are high-risk.
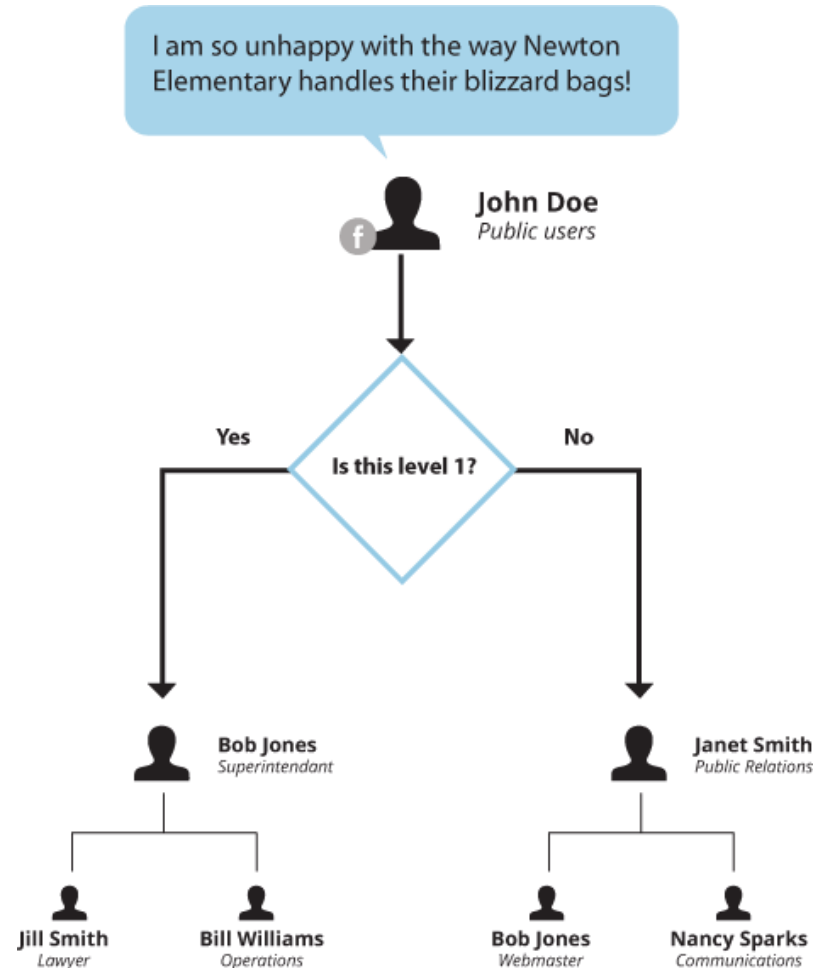
Tips for social media

Build your following

When a web visitor is on your website, that's your golden opportunity to promote your school's social media. They've found your way to your web communications hub, now take advantage of their visit and make it virtually impossible for them not to follow you. Place follow buttons easily within reach and at every turn as they navigate your website.

Tips:

1. Add follow buttons on all email communication such as newsletters, updates and announcements.
2. Make sure they are above the fold and prominent. Don't be subtle.
3. Include them in the footer of your website, prominently on the homepage and teacher pages.
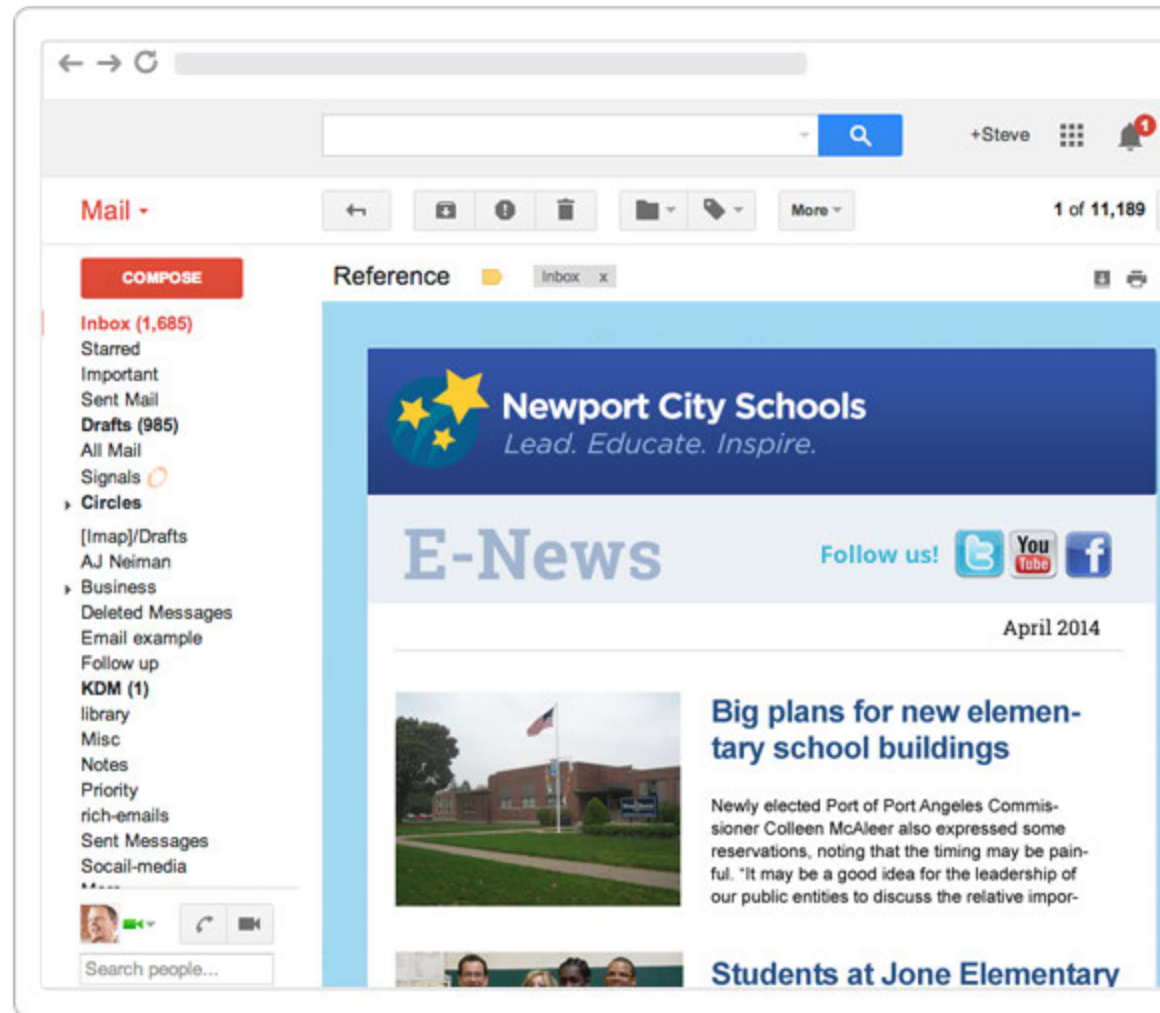
Like and share buttons

In addition to building a following through follow buttons, sharing is your best route to getting more followers, so make sure you place share links all throughout your website. These are especially important on all your news and blog pages. Make sure you use the appropriate share links to only those social media channels you're managing.

Tips:

1. Include sharing buttons at the top of news, blogs and other content you would like to share.
2. Create the like and share links so they open social media pages in new windows.
3. There are several free sharing options that can be easily added to any website, such as *AddThis* and *ShareThis.*
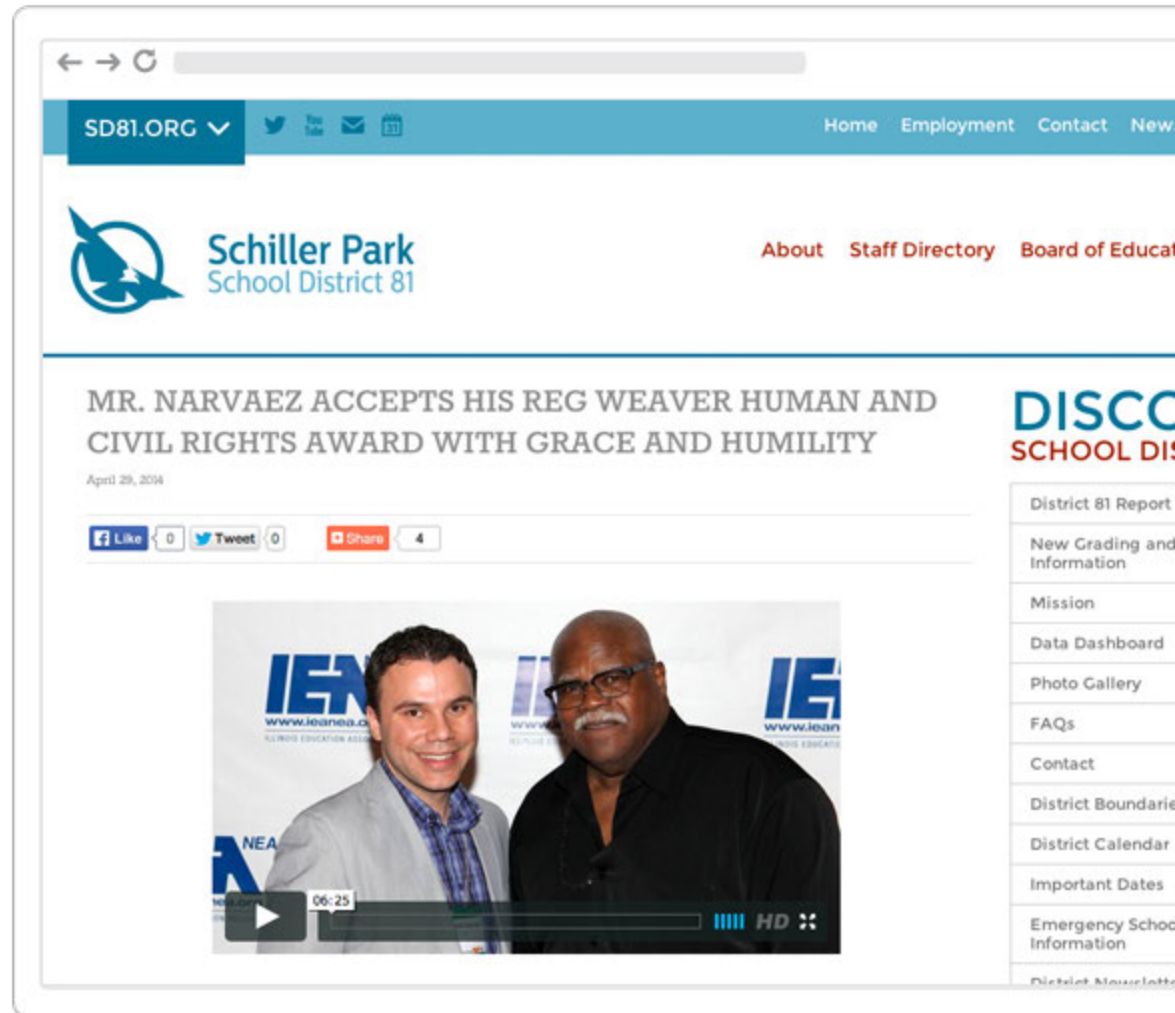
Making it mobile friendly

Social media is the best way to keep up with people on the go, and let's face it, we're all on the move these days. People prefer to get and share news, information, and entertainment via smartphones and tablets, so your school's got to join in the mix.

All the popular social media channels have mobile apps, so it's now a breeze to reach your audiences. With over 70% of parents having mobile web access and more than 50% of all Facebook users use the mobile app, make sure your school website is set up to respond to the growing number of mobile users.

Tips:
1. Make sure your website features 'responsive design,' which automatically formats your web content to look and act great on mobile devices.
2. Use short, snappy, attention-getting headlines that are easy to read in quick glances.
3. Include images – good, in-focus ones – but don't overdo it. Too many images means lots of scrolling or advancing.
4. No Flash on your video formats.
5. Use lots of kids, teachers and parents in your pictures. They're sure to share that way.
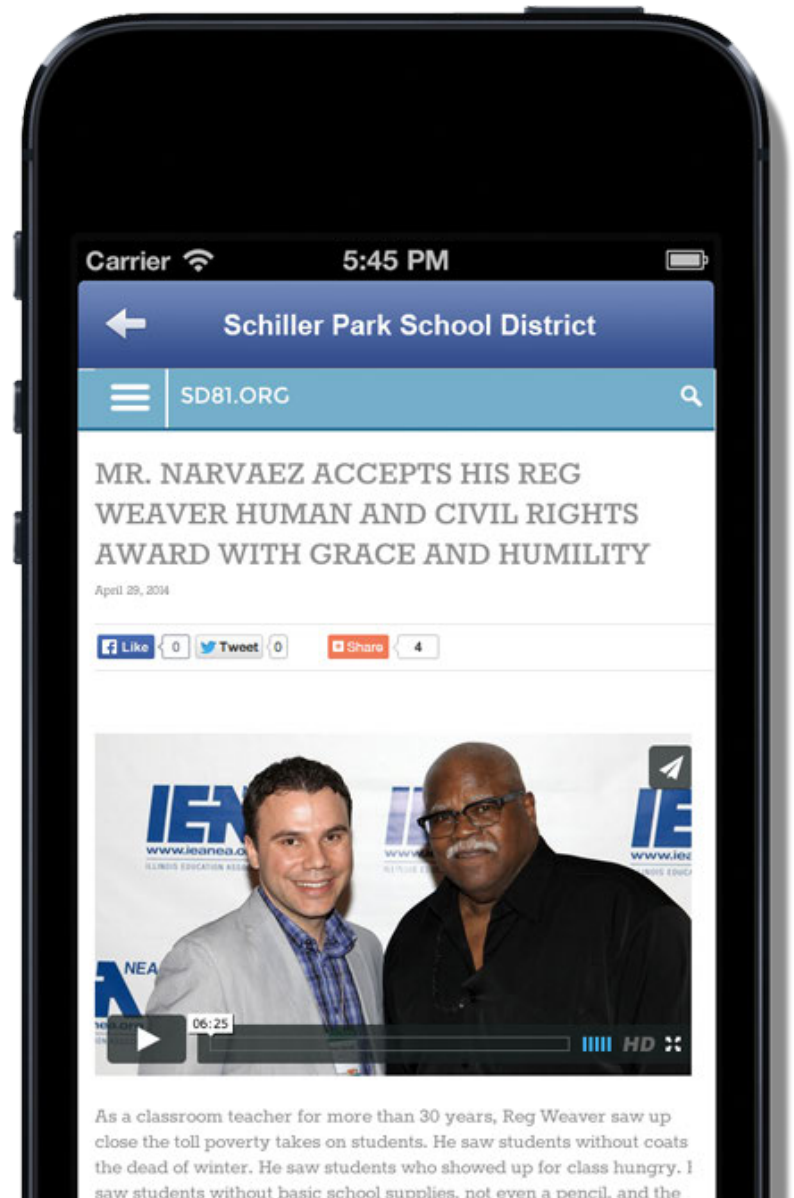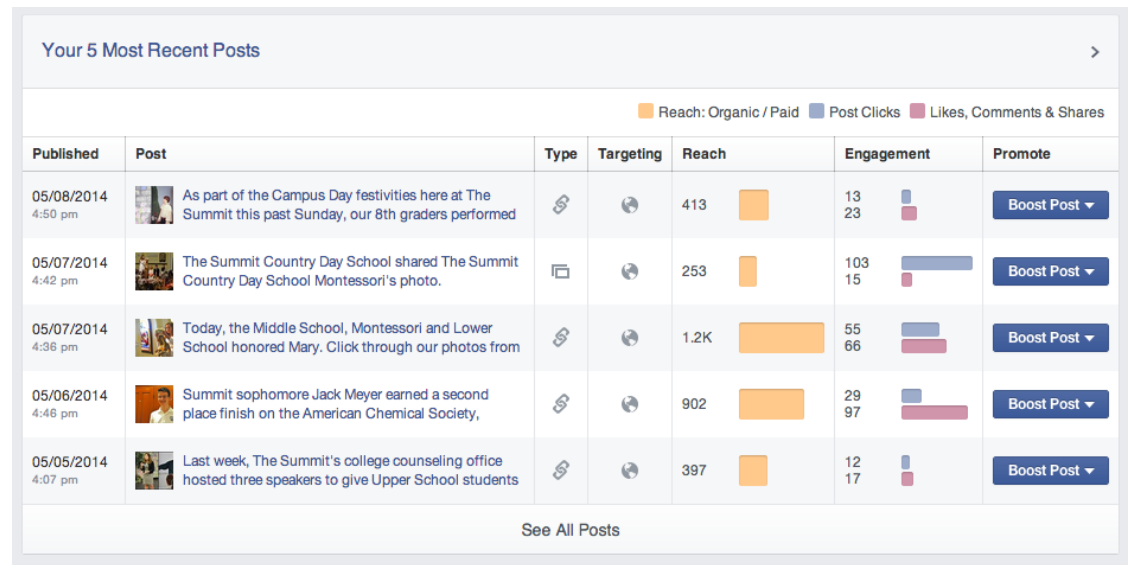
See what is working

The great advantage of having all this content moving through social media channels is the ability and ease of seeing what's working and what's not working. Most schools want to monitor and analyze the reach and engagement that occurs primarily through Facebook and Twitter, although Pinterest and Google + are gaining momentum as viable tools for expanding a school's online profile. It's all about reach and engagement. Reach is the number of unique visitors to your page or post, and engagement is the number of people who've shared, liked or commented on your posts.

Tips:

1. Regularly review analytics provided by Facebook and Twitter accounts.
2. Keep a document with all of you posts that drive high results and follow the same success.
3. Facebook analytics can be found with 'Page Insights.'
4. Twitter analytics can be found at https://analytics.twitter.com/.

Tools to help manage

The list of online tools to help you monitor and manage your school's social media is growing rapidly and for good reason. Their roots are in the world of commerce, where social media has had the traction to have profound influence on marketing communications practices. Schools, certainly without the resources or know-how to master social media a la Fortune 500 companies, are nonetheless beginning to follow some of the same practices and use the similar if not the very same tools to reach their respective audiences.

We've assembled a sampling of some of the popular social media management tools so that you can begin exploring and tap the technology to support your educational mission. We've included some additional resources to help your school navigate the social media landscape and help you build a strong foundation for building an effective social media program at your school.

Schedule posts to multiple channels

Hootsuite is one of many tools available that help you schedule posts to multiple social networks. With it, you can keep track of all your posts and monitor what people are saying about your school. The free version does not include all the bells and whistles many businesses use for a deeper analysis of their social media, but for a school or district, it's plenty powerful, enabling you to manage up to 5 profiles.

Schedule and manage channels:

1. Create drafts and schedule your post to specified channels.
2. Monitor your streams in a unified view.
3. Reply to direct messages, mentions, and comments.
4. Smart scheduling - Schedule post to be delivered at peak times to reach your audiences. (e.g., students are best reached during the evening, parents during the day)
5. Bulk upload a spreadsheet of all your post.
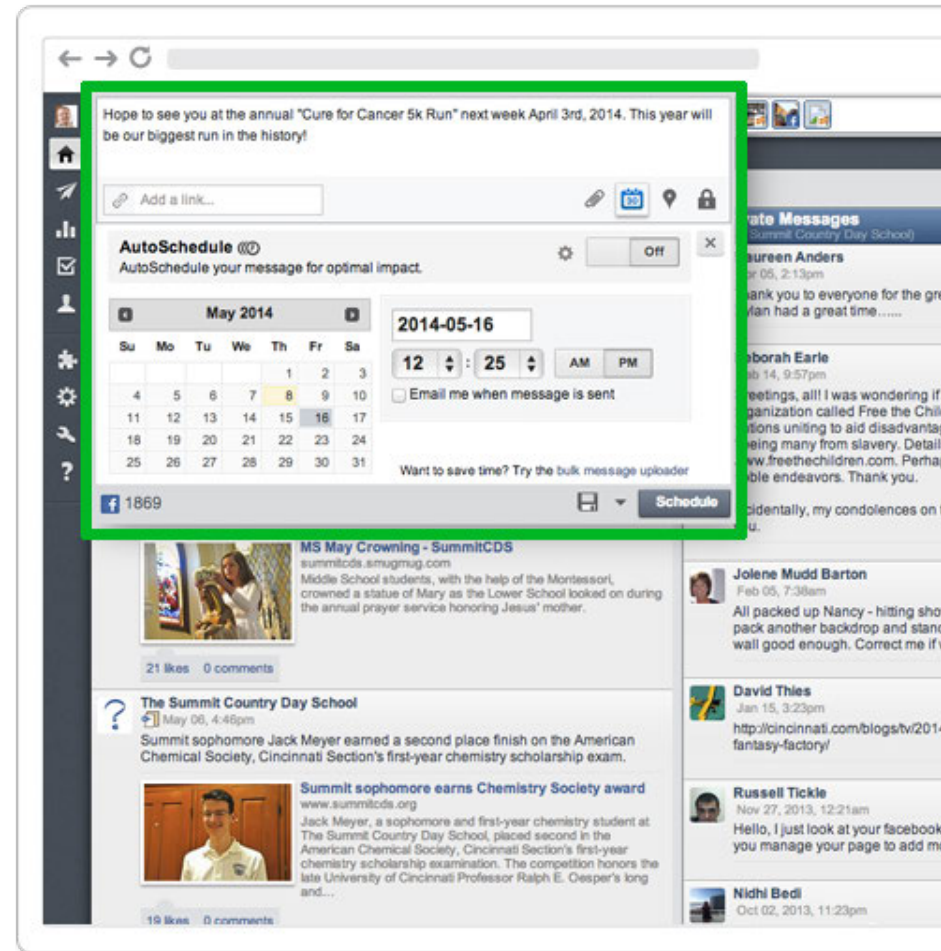
Manage private messages and assign follow-up tasks

Hootsuite not only gives you a way to manage all the outbound posts, but also provides a way to manage all the activity coming in. It's important your school not only monitors messages effectively, but responds quickly.

Collaborative messaging features:

1. Set up staff members and departments for structured response procedure.
2. Give team members different permissions for access to different channels.
3. Assign tasks for follow up for different staff members.
4. Receive notifications on private message responses.
5. Complete 'paper' trail' of all messages in a single view.

Monitor keywords on social media

Mention is an online listening tool that works similarly to Google Alerts, but goes well beyond. Mention provides all the keyword monitoring on web pages, news articles and blogs that Google Plus provides, plus real-time monitoring of the web and social media. Mention has the capability of setting up email notifications and sharing alerts with designated school staff. It also offers a scaled-down free version.

Stay apprised and ready to respond:

1. Monitor of web content such as blogs and social media in real time.
2. Receive notifications via phone apps.
3. Analyze the activity within a period of time.
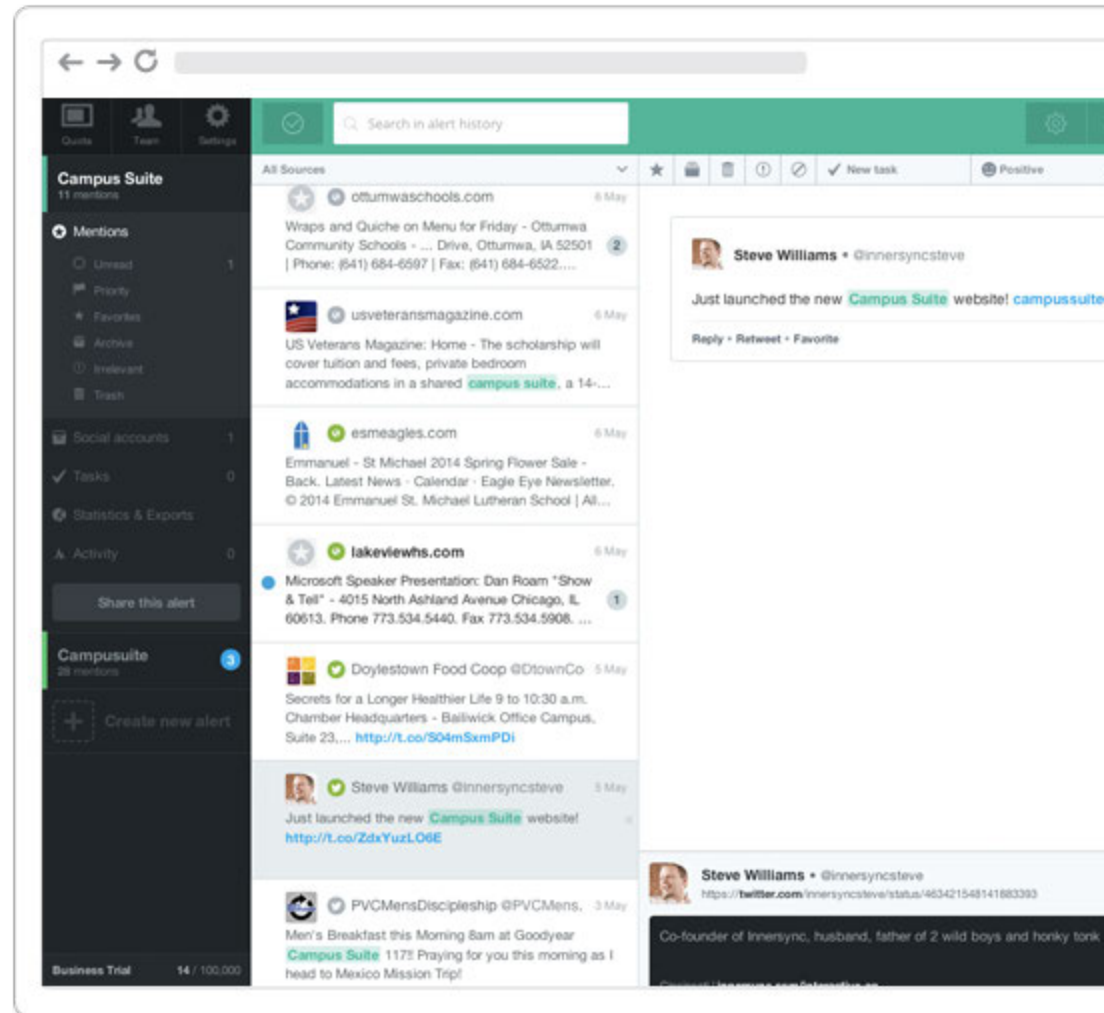
Assign team members response tasks

When inaccurate or false information about your school – or positive praise – is posted, you want to be able to respond. Mention gives you the ability learn about the posts right away and automatically assign tasks and workflows for the respective social media channels for on-the-spot response. Like a customer complaint or an 'attaboy,' how quickly and professionally you respond reflects on your school.

Respond to user-generated content:

1. React quickly when a keyword is detected in social media channels or the web.
2. Build your team and assign task to respond to activity.
3. Receive alerts via email and phones.
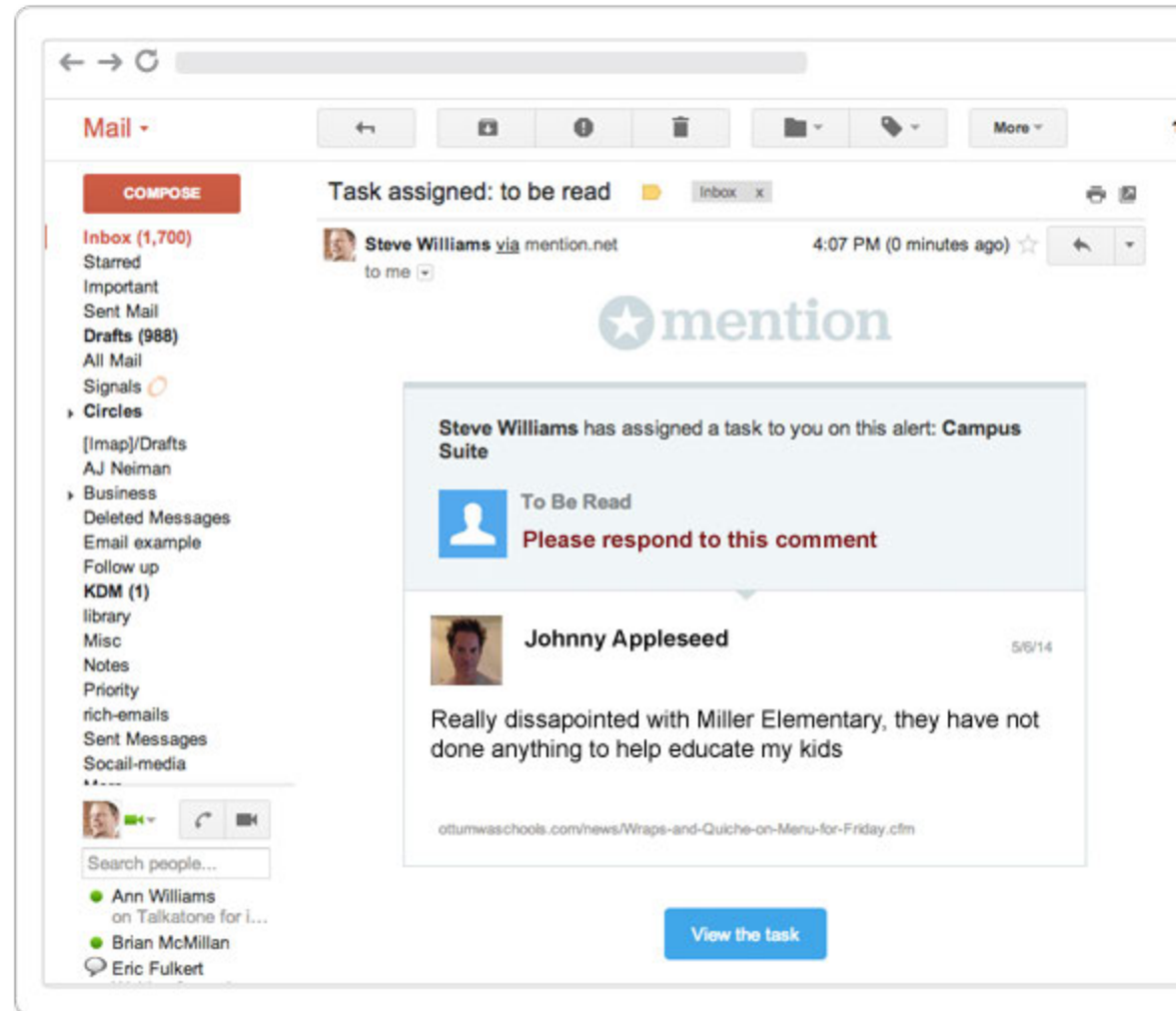
Track keywords in news and blogs

Google Alerts are emails sent to you when Google finds new results -- such as web pages, newspaper articles, or blogs -- that match your search term. You can use Google Alerts to monitor anything on the internet. All you need is a Google account.

Gather school-related news and blog content:

- Find out what is being said about your school and who's saying it.
- Monitor a developing news story.
- Keep up to date on neighboring schools or league rivals.

Resources - helpful links

Social Media Monitoring Tools (See bit.ly/1iLZXSR)

A list of 20 popular Social Media Monitoring Tools that help you keep tabs on what they're saying about your lacrosse team, spelling bee champ or your school levy. Tools can help you promote and distribute the good news, respond and subdue the bad news, and analyze all your social media data.

EdTech (See [bit.ly/1sng6Py](bit.ly/1sng6Py))

If you're not already familiar with this compendium of all things edu-technical, this online magazine includes a K-12 focus (and a higher education section) and is one of the best industry resources for up-to-date social media news and tips for educators.

Edudemic (See bit.ly/1dYhHo2)

With more than a million monthly views, Edudemic is one of the leading education technology sites on the web, connecting teachers, administrators and students with technology. We recommend subscribing to this free site and staying up to date with its social media content linked above.

edutopia (See bit.ly/1krBdAZ)

This tasty little site is the website workhorse of The George Lucas Educational Foundation. No surprise it's all about innovation in education, including a comprehensive collection of blogs, articles and videos all on and about social media.