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SOCIAL MEDIA HANDBOOK

for Agricultural Development Practitioners

How to use
this document...

ICONS

> *"The future is already here—it's just
> not evenly distributed."*
>
> ~ William Gibson, quoted in
> The Economist, December 4, 2003

WHY IS SOCIAL MEDIA IMPORTANT?

The power of social media—for those who have access—is truly remarkable. Globally, nearly one in four people connect to social networks on a monthly basis. More than one billion accounts are registered on the single most popular social network, Facebook. These numbers continue to climb every quarter as populations in developing nations increasingly come online.[2]

Globally, nearly one in four people connect to social networks on a monthly basis.

For agricultural development practitioners, social media tools can expand the reach of your community, strengthen partner relationships, support programmatic initiatives, and provide a vital means to increase the visibility of your public profile and engagement.

The quote above from Gibson, noted science fiction author and the man who coined the term 'cyberspace,' is especially apropos because of its timing. In 2003, Skype and LinkedIn—two of the largest and most successful existing social services—were founded. Today, in the robustly connected parts of the world, 'social media' constitute a new social operating system that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Huge differences remain in the way different populations experience the internet

Coupled with the decreasing cost of mobile and personal computing hardware, social media tools have helped to democratize the creation and dissemination of information. For the first time in human history, billions of individuals are now able to self-publish their own content.

To further extend Gibson's distribution reference, as this mobile technology disburses, we may be entering a period of relative 'evening out.' Regardless, huge differences remain in the way different populations experience the internet and the social media tools supported by it. Economic and social barriers have very real implications. Although much of the developing world is focused on obtaining the most basic mobile technologies, advances in social tools and platforms for modern smartphones routinely stretch our imaginations. Understanding those continuing technological gaps is critical to the success or failure of social media-based agricultural communication initiatives.

2   ReMarketer: "*Social Networking Reaches Nearly One in Four Around the World*." Blog post published: 6/28/13.

LAUNCH WEBSITE

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CONTACT

Acknowledgements

About FACET

FACET is funded by USAID's Bureau for Africa, Office of Sustainable Development, Economic Growth, Environment and Agriculture Division (AFR/SD/EGEA). The project works closely with USAID's Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and the Environment (USAID/E3) and USAID missions, as well as implementing partners, governments, and the private sector, to provide technical assistance to better enhance the competitiveness and trade in the agriculture sector across sub-Saharan Africa. Designed to be interactive and collaborative, FACET provides technical assistance to improve competitiveness and productivity across agriculture sub-sectors through the use of ICTs as tools to enhance the functioning and competitiveness of agricultural value chains and facilitate trade in agricultural products across sub-Saharan Africa.

To achieve its objectives, FACET has two components:

- Knowledge sharing across missions regarding sustainable and scalable approaches to using ICT to increase the success of Feed the Future activities.
- Short-term technical assistance to projects to help them improve their uses of ICT, especially in ways that may be helpful to other projects as well.

Numerous briefing papers and application profiles produced by FACET, along with other resources related to ICT and agriculture, can be accessed online at: http://www.ICTforAg.org. Further information on the project can be obtained by contacting Josh Woodard at jwoodard@fhi360.org.

About the Authors

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Josh Woodard is a project manager in TechLab @ FHI 360 and has managed the FACET project since its inception in 2009. He has been experimenting with low-cost information and communications technologies for more than a decade. Josh is the author of numerous publications focused on ICT and agriculture, including two practical toolkits for practitioners: Integrating Low-Cost Video into Agricultural Development Projects and Interactive Radio for Agricultural Development Projects. He has also designed and facilitated workshops on low-cost ICT tools, computer lab sustainability, low-cost video, and digital storytelling for rural schools in Indonesia, rural communities in Thailand, local project staff in Macedonia, Farmer to Farmer implementers in the US, and USAID projects and their local partners from over 10 countries in Africa.

CONTENTS

ORIENTATION AND INTRODUCTION

Of course, there are also technical requirements for using social media, and it is not a short list. Whether in a high- or low-resource settings, the user needs a modicum of electricity, hardware, software, and access to online networks. In most of the world, users need money to access cybercafés or have access to web-enabled mobile phones. Generally, each of these resources has a direct or indirect cost. Once those barriers are clearly addressed, users still require some basic technological fluency to begin to navigate the internet and use social media.

Only if one's target audience has all those prerequisites covered will social media provide significant utility to projects. Whether focused on behavior change or strategic communications, to date most social media efforts in agriculture have not focused on smallholder farmers in the field, instead tending to target larger scale farmers, agribusinesses, and agricultural development practitioners. It is understandable, since a large majority of the world's agricultural practitioners and farmers live in rural, developing contexts, where these basic technical hurdles have hindered internet access.

It is still an uneven picture, but mobile technology is changing that basic value proposition. Increased populations around the globe are coming online with an accelerating pace, and the desire for social media engagement is one primary driver in that process. If agricultural projects

WHO IS THIS HANDBOOK FOR?

This handbook aims to help simplify social media for agricultural practitioners of various skill levels. Its content will also be relevant to a broader audience interested in learning more about some emerging trends in social media applications for international development.

As with the internet overall, the field of social media is ever-evolving. Hence, any social media strategy, platform, or tool must be inherently flexible to be effective. This is especially true of the content, platforms, and tools that we've grown accustomed to communicating with via the web.

New startups, platforms, and features can appear (and disappear) overnight. Most changes to existing platforms are tested in myriad ways— both subtle and obvious—to produce a desired outcome (e.g., a leap in user engagement or ad revenue).[1]

1   Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed*. Book. Soft Skull Press 2011.

Social media is ever-evolving

SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Electricity

Hardware

Software

Access to online networks

Basic technical hurdles have hindered internet access to date

Increased populations around the globe are coming online with an accelerating pace

can harness this wave of connectivity in creative ways via social media, they may achieve the scale that has proven costly, inefficient, or downright impossible by other means.

This handbook is intended to provide a clear-eyed view of the benefits and limitations of social media as tools for international development projects. It aims to provide actionable guidance to those interested in integrating social media into their broader communications planning—with a specific focus on agricultural development, and on sub-Saharan Africa and other, similarly low-bandwidth environments.

These social platforms and technologies may be new to some, but there is already a large body of evidence and experience to suggest what works, what doesn't, and what is still in the trial-and-error stage for online communications and social media.

WHAT WILL I FIND IN THIS HANDBOOK?

This handbook aims to provide practical information, suggestions, and resources for using social media within your agricultural development work. The handbook is divided into four components. The first component focuses on providing an overview of the global state of play of social media, general considerations in the use and consumption of social media, including challenges you may face, and examples of some common social media applications.

The second component explores current and potential applications of social media in agriculture and low-bandwidth environments. This includes several case studies of development initiatives from around

the globe, including the USAID-funded FACET project.

The third component is designed to help you determine whether and how to plan to use social media based on your project objectives, operating context, and human and material resource availability. It includes tools to help you select appropriate social media platforms and channels, develop activity and branding plans, launch your social media activity, and develop and use activity checklists to monitor the progress of your activity.

Finally, the fourth component guides you through the process of developing effective and compelling social media content. It includes tips for building a content marketing strategy, managing resources, improving content based on ongoing monitoring of effectiveness, and an explanation of different types of content and how they can be used to maximize impact.

COMMUNITY IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTEXT

Online community can be just as diverse in its definitions, vitality, and raison d'être as any real world community. Generally speaking, an online community consists of people touching base online to share information, interact, or work towards a specific goal. Often online communities:

→ Are affinity-based
→ Either supplement offline activities or exist exclusively online
→ Rely on differing social rules, as body language and visual cues generally are lacking
→ Can be more fickle and fragile than offline communities

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Huge differences remain in the way different populations experience the internet

connected parts of the world, 'social media' constitute a new social operating system that is greater than the sum of its parts. Coupled with the decreasing cost of mobile and personal computing hardware, social media tools have helped to democratize the creation and dissemination of information. For the first time in human history, billions of individuals are now able to self-publish their own content.

To further extend Gibson's distribution reference, as this mobile technology disburses, we may be entering a period of relative 'evening out.' Regardless, huge differences remain in the way different populations experience the internet and the social media tools supported by it. Economic and social barriers have very real implications. Although much of the developing world is focused on obtaining the most basic mobile technologies, advances in social tools and platforms for modern smartphones routinely stretch our imaginations. Understanding those continuing technological gaps is critical to the success or failure of social media-based agricultural communication initiatives.

DEFINING
'Social Media'

For the purposes of this handbook, social media refers to internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information among people.

This is an intentionally broad definition, as even the simplest online communities, when well executed, are inherently 'social.' Social media also refers to the content itself: user-generated information, opinion, video, audio, and multimedia that is shared and discussed over digital networks.

This definition assumes that truly social services get more useful, relevant or valuable as the number of users grow beyond a small group. It also differentiates social media from primarily *'one-to-one'* communications, such as basic mobile text messaging, and more than a suite of communication tools. The opportunity for asymmetric communication—*'one-to-many'* vs. *'one-to-one'*—has already proven a potent vehicle for social and political revolution, for example. It also can provide an undeniably powerful means of producing, crowdsourcing, curating, re-packaging, and disseminating online content.

Social media tools may include (but are not limited to):

→ **Social networking sites** (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace)

→ **Video and photo sharing websites** (e.g. Flickr, YouTube)

→ **Blogs**

→ **Microblogs** (e.g. Twitter, Tumblr)

→ **Forums, discussion boards, and groups** (e.g. Google Groups, Yahoo Groups)

→ **Wikis** (e.g. Wikipedia)

→ **Video on demand and podcasts**

→ **Video conferences and web conferences**

→ **Email and instant messaging**

→ **Socially integrated mobile text messaging**

→ **Websites with social plugins and layers**

SOCIAL MEDIA DON'T JUST CONNECT US – NOW THEY AUGMENT OUR EXPERIENCE

Linked by social networks, online discussion forums, and content sharing sites, people are now readily and iteratively sharing information about their lives and experiences in complex ways using social media. Although this behavior has hardly bypassed agricultural development, most efforts have yet to fully capitalize on this new era for numerous reasons detailed below.

Increasingly these social tools supplement and intermingle with in-person communities built around family ties, geography, or solidarity networks. Not only do they facilitate interpersonal connections, they augment and in some cases, replace, the face-to-face human experiences of previous eras.

With a smartphone in an unfamiliar city, Facebook's mobile app can help us stay connected with our faraway relatives, while Google Maps provides turn-by-turn walking directions. A social music sharing service can suggest local sounds for our listening pleasure, while we browse a restaurant app to find a discounted lunchtime meal. These tools would have almost certainly looked like science fiction a generation ago. [3]

It highlights a larger point that often goes unrecognized in our narrow views of social media. Increasingly, our lives are being augmented by internet-based services, instead of conveniently sorted into 'online' and 'offline' experiences. The list of rapidly emerging and involving technologies that will 'socialize' everyday experience is too numerous to list here.[4]

3   Nathan Jurgenson. *"When Atoms Meet Bits: Social Media, the Mobile Web, and Augmented Revolution"* Jan 2012. *Future Internet.*

4   For a fascinating visual timeline of educated guesses, check out Emerging Technology's *Envisioning Emerging Technology.*

Put simply, the next batch of socially integrated technologies will likely seem just as futuristic to us today as our modern tools may have appeared to our parents or grandparents.

Indeed, these are still very early days in the history and impact of social media tools. One thing to be sure of: Increased access to internet and high bandwidth will open more of the world's population to more creative social media uses. To date, the most developed uses of these tools in agriculture are generally focused on knowledge sharing and dissemination. But this is changing, as numerous examples shared in this handbook will illustrate.

WHY PEOPLE USE SOCIAL SITES

So why do people connect, and what are they looking for? People connect over shared interests and aims. They explore topics they care about and recommend things to their networks. Romances bloom. Programmers share code. Dance crazes emerge. And in this deluge of wired existence, development projects share their success stories and create demand for their services. Companies share their latest products. New social technologies also drive social movements, from revolution and counterrevolution in Egypt, to giving voice to those organizing protests among turmeric farmers in India, to facilitating large international movements in protest or support of genetically modified crops.

This is the point—social media enable us to continue pursuing our needs and interests—but with a broader potential reach and increased ease of access to everyone within our networks. And this access to information and connections is available in 'real-time,' making data that was once 'far' or out of reach accessible in an immediate way.

People connect over shared interests and aims

In the near future, it is reasonable to suspect that farmers in Indonesia will debate the best system of rice intensification using location-based camera phone images, while Liberian extension agents crowdsource reviews of market actors to build a reputation-based online grain marketplace. The success of these efforts will depend not only on the technical fluency of your team and target audience, but also on the relevancy of the content and services you deliver.

A NOTE: *Not everything can be generalized across particular geographic or demographic categories. More than any other previous communications era, social media cater to the individual voice. In a world of information overload, social media practitioners should always strive to establish personal relevance. But individuals do not operate in a bubble. Using social media requires iterative stock-taking of users' demographics, needs, desires, and practical experience in order to establish and maintain relevance.*

Thus, listen closely to your target audience with an eye for local context. Often the telling details about what they are looking for and the ways in which they communicate can be invaluable as you shape your social media initiatives.

In the following four components, you will find ideas that can help you navigate local context with a more informed perspective. Included in this is a vision of key drivers of social media for agricultural development (especially in sub-Saharan Africa and similarly low-bandwidth environments), a number of illustrative examples, helpful ideas on how to best integrate social channels into your larger plans, and tips and tricks to generating worthwhile content that will get attention from your target constituents.

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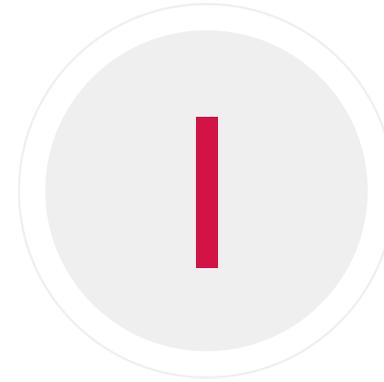
THE GLOBAL STATE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

GOALS

When you finish this component, you will

• Understand the global social media landscape, along with potential opportunities and challenges

As anyone accustomed to a speedy internet connection who suddenly struggles with a slow one knows, even minor changes in an operating environment can dramatically affect user experiences. Such changes matter when designing social media strategies. Although more people than ever are online today, and broadly positive global and regional trends in internet accessibility are marching ahead, the situation may look very different at a more local level. That said, it is worthwhile to understand the global trends and challenges as you begin to think about how social media might be appropriate in the local context you are working in.

By 2017, at least a third of the planet will be engaged regularly through social media

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

As a global population, social media engagement is moving from an activity of the privileged few to a different phase in the technology cycle. By 2017, at least a third of the planet will be engaged regularly through social media. In places with a legacy of robust communications infrastructure, the body of research into online engagement and behavior is extensive. But in places just coming online, there are very little reliable quantitative and qualitative data.

As an agricultural development community, we are still experimenting with services and feeling around in the dark for data. This is officially the experimentation phase, and this handbook tries to responsibly extrapolate from the more connected areas of the world to draw broad conclusions for what may be coming next to the primarily rural places where agricultural livelihoods predominate in the developing world.

Globally, according to online research firm eMarketer, total social media users are forecast to grow everywhere, but the most explosive growth over the next few years is expected to occur in the Asia-Pacific region (including China, India, and Indonesia), Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. As users in these regions join in these technologies, rural agricultural users will likely gain a new pathway to information and social connections.

Total social media users are forecast to grow everywhere

TABLE 1

Social Network User Penetration Worldwide, by Region, 2011–2017
% of population in each group

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
North America	47.3	50.0	51.6	53.1	54.4	55.3	56.3
Western Europe	34.5	38.5	41.9	44.5	46.4	48.1	49.4
Central & Eastern Europe	32.0	36.1	40.4	44.2	47.1	49.5	51.8
Latin America	25.8	30.8	36.2	40.8	45.9	49.1	52.1
Asia-Pacific	13.8	16.2	19.7	22.8	25.4	27.9	30.2
Middle East & Africa	**9.5**	**12.4**	**15.5**	**18.0**	**20.3**	**22.5**	**24.2**
Worldwide	17.6	20.9	24.4	27.4	30.1	32.4	34.5

NOTE: *Internet users who use a social network site via any device at least once per month*
Source: eMarketer, April 2013

The table projects that in 2017, roughly 2.65 billion will access social media on a monthly basis, from 1.73 billion today.

TABLE 2

Social Network User Penetration Worldwide, by Region , 2011–2017

% of population in each group

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Middle East & Africa	**66.7**	**74.3**	**80.5**	**83.8**	**87.2**	**90.3**	**92.8**
Central & Eastern Europe	69.9	71.9	74.3	75.9	76.8	77.3	77.9
Latin America	65.2	68.9	72.4	74.9	79.1	80.4	82.3
North America	63.4	65.6	66.6	67.5	68.1	68.6	70.0
Asia-Pacific	52.4	58.3	64.2	68.6	72.1	75.5	78.0
Western Europe	53.1	57.9	61.5	64.1	65.9	67.6	68.9
Worldwide	58.2	63.1	67.7	71.1	74.1	76.6	78.7

NOTE: *Internet users who use a social network site via any device at least once per month*
Source: eMarketer, April 2013

What is the biggest hurdle to engaging social media? **Access.** Notice the strong enthusiasm for social networking from the newly connected.

MOBILE NATIVES

So how are these new masses getting online? It is primarily by mobile device, especially where home-based communications infrastructure is relatively rare. Since less than one percent of homes in all of sub-Saharan Africa have fixed broadband connections, one can safely assume that those connections are concentrated in dense cities, and that rural agricultural areas have virtually no such connections.

Fixed (wired) broadband subscription in 2012

27%	6%	>1%
'Developed' Countries	'Developing' Countries	Sub-Saharan Africa

Source: ITU[1]

1 Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world (totals and penetration rates) International Telecommunications Unions (ITU). Geneva. 27 February 2013. http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx

Mobile phones can serve as invaluable substitutes and complement traditional information and communications technologies (ICTs) in many developing places. In common speech, the mobile phone is often referred to as a 'leap frog' technology for its utility in overcoming previous communications infrastructure barriers.

Active mobile broadband subscriptions by region
(2011 figures are estimates)

Global: 2,096m	Africa: 93m	CIS:129m
Developed nations: 934m	Arab States: 71m	Europe: 422m
Developing nations: 1,162m	Asia & Pacific: 895m	The Americas: 460m

Europe 422m
CIS 129m
Arab States 71m
The Americas 460m
Africa 93m
Asia & Pacific 895m
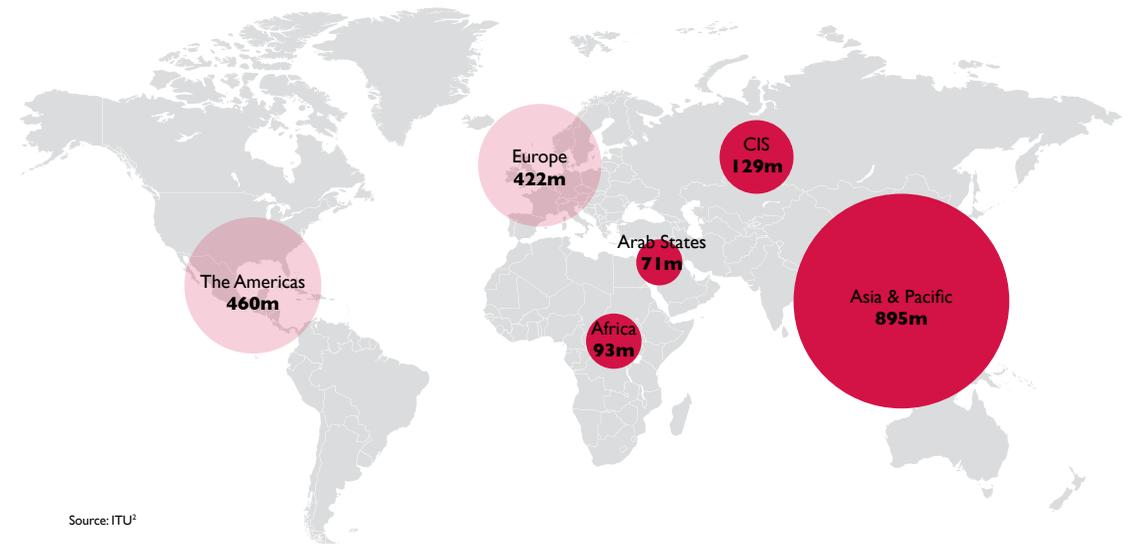
Source: ITU[2]

2 Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world (totals and penetration rates) International Telecommunications Unions (ITU). Geneva. 27 February 2013. http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx

SMART PHONE VS. FEATURE PHONE—
What is the difference?

According to General Dynamics, in 2010 the purchasing decisions of 80 percent of global mobile phone consumers were driven primarily by affordability.*

While more recent statistics are not available, there is little reason to think things have changed dramatically. In order to compete, companies have found ways to reduce device costs by offering feature phones with minimal functionality.

Key **feature phone** traits include:

• low price

• voice and text

• simpler data and graphic functions

• relatively small amounts of memory and processing power

• battery-efficient

With the emergence of Blackberry, iPhone, and Android technologies, a category of mobile devices has evolved into much more sophisticated uses—and applications fit better with the concept of computer than mobile phone. A smartphone today offers the possibility of rich and personalized social media experiences.

Key **smartphone** traits include:

• higher price

• touch or keyboard interface

• interactive applications (e.g., social networking) and games

• internet on the go (e.g., full browsing experience, news, mobile information systems)

• location-based services

• battery-intensive

* General Dynamics. _White Paper: Mass-Market Smartphone Solution_ May 2010. (Requires email registration)

Within just 15 years, mobile phones have created benefits that would have taken generations to create in the past. Mobile payment services like M-PESA have been highly successful and positively disruptive to local economies in several countries. Like no other product, the mobile phone has allowed the benefits of ICT to trickle down to the general populace at an accessible price. To that end, mobile phones now vastly outnumber personal computers in Africa. Note that where there are no fixed internet connections or other means of widespread PC connectivity, there is significantly less use for personal computers. Thus, though the data is lacking, this ratio is likely much higher in agricultural communities where personal computers are comparatively rare.

INCOME GAPS HAVE TECHNOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Despite consistently falling prices for many smartphone models, their cost remains a major barrier to mass adoption. As a result, most mobiles currently sold in developing economies are feature phones. It will change in time, but for at least the next five years, feature phones will continue to dominate web access in Africa. That means that the gap in hardware sophistication will continue to grow.

WHY THIS MATTERS: There are real limitations to the sophistication and speed of the data-rich social services that feature phones can support. Smartphones will drop in price, but for the several billion people living on less than $2 a day, it will be a long time before they can buy one.

THE GOOD NEWS: In 2012, 88 percent of all mobile phones sold and shipped globally were web-capable. And many feature phones may soon get smarter. Some private companies are working to mimic a smartphone's

In 2012, 88 percent of all mobile phones sold and shipped globally were web-capable.

abilities with a feature phone using limited resources. By creatively reprogramming services for feature phone operating systems, developers can empower feature phones with additional functions such as access to 'cloud computing,' where web-based services can interact with phones or play short video clips.

CHALLENGES

The remarkable mobile growth story paints a rosy picture of social media platforms as a collection of open, global town squares for the exchange of ideas. Although there is an element of truth contained therein, it is an oversimplification, and one that can cloud our perspective in important ways. Social media have also created new challenges, and repackaged existing ones.

WHAT THE DIGITAL DIVIDE LOOKS LIKE TODAY

Concerns about the 'digital divide'—the concept that some rich countries will have access to the internet for economic and social benefits while poorer countries will not—once dominated international discussion around our technological future. That debate is becoming more nuanced as affordable mobile phones spread around the globe.

The mobile phone market now consists of a staggering variety of devices with a range of capabilities and price points. Correspondingly, demand in Africa and globally is also extraordinarily broad and mobile phones are

largely seen as a necessity all over the continent. In a June 2012 survey, Gallup observed, "Of all Africans surveyed living on less than $1 a day, half had access to mobile phones. Of those Africans in the bottom quintile—the lowest 20 percent—the number was the same."[3]

For all the wonder and opportunity created by the spread of the mobile phone, it is not a panacea. Today there is growing concern over the increasing gap of available bandwidth speeds and resulting functionality. While many parts of the world have access to reliable broadband, the majority of people in the world do not.

Indeed, in 2013 only an estimated 25.9 percent of people in the developing world have access to broadband via fixed line or mobile access, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).[4] In Africa, those numbers trend much lower, and many countries simply don't report any data. The reasons for this gap in broadband are myriad—but a basic examination of how data travels to and from Africa provides some key insights. Part of the problem is poor network performance. From the IEEE Spectrum:

> The total bandwidth available to shuttle data between African countries and the rest of the world in 2011 was less than 1 terabit

3. "Payments and Money Transfer Behavior of Sub-Saharan Africans," Gallup. June 2012. via "Bigger Cities, Smaller Screens," Adam Clayton Powell. CIMA Media. June 2012
4. Mobile Broadband Access= 19.8%, Fixed Broadband Access=6.1%. Statistics from Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world (totals and penetration rates) International Telecommunications Unions (ITU). Geneva. 27 February 2013. http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx

The mobile phone market now consists of a staggering variety of devices with a range of capabilities and price points.

per second. That's about one-seventieth of Europe's international bandwidth capacity. Making matters worse, the price for bandwidth in Africa is cripplingly high. While a university in Germany might pay about US $4000 per month for 1 gigabit per second of bandwidth, a school in Kenya can expect to pay $200,000 for the same service.[5]

Since 2011, African governments and private companies have invested billions to try to remedy the supply issue, installing additional submarine cables and terrestrial networks around the continent. In some places, it has made a big difference in connection speeds and prices (for example, Zambia, Kenya, Cameroon, Benin).[6] But the geniune question remains: Is Africa catching up, or just falling behind less quickly?

Of course, this situation applies to many places. In many of the world's most populous countries, access to broadband speeds via fixed line or mobile device (3G or higher) is a rare and valuable commodity. Because broadband connections are the railroads of the 21st century—essential infrastructure required to transmit products (these days, in the form of information) from seller to buyer—creaky internet performance can have wide-ranging impacts on entrepreneurs, users, and entire economies.
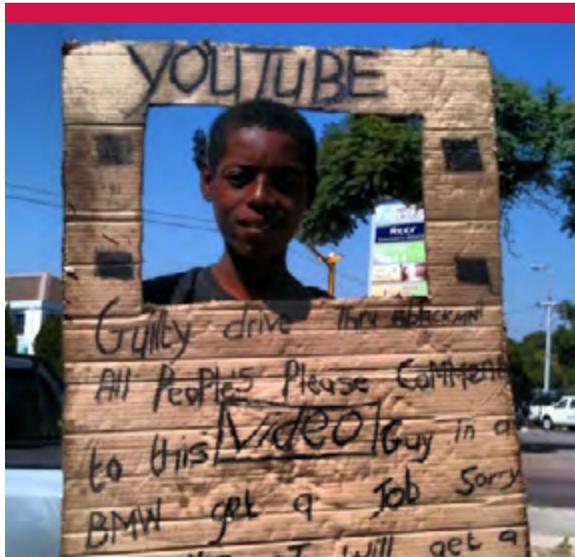
GENDER BARRIERS PERSIST

Across the globe there are disparities between men and women in access to income-generating activities and new technologies. According to the World Bank, women provide 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, but due to a host of technological, social, and market challenges, they are consistently less productive and keep less of their income than men.[7] As a technology tool for the developing world, the internet is no exception. According to the first quantitative research on the topic, Intel found that in sub-Saharan Africa 45 percent fewer women than men have access to the internet.[8] Thus, if you want to reach women, you will likely have to design specific strategies for those audiences.

Women provide 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries

THE COST OF CONNECTING

There are two basic business models for providing data from the internet. While most users in North America and Europe are familiar with an ostensibly unlimited ('uncapped') data plan, where an ISP or mobile data provider charges a flat fee for monthly access, much of the world lives by very different practices. 'Metered' users elsewhere pay by the unit of data—the gigabyte or megabyte, for example.

The two media ecosystems are very different. If your target audiences are in uncapped countries, the web is already very competitive. In this generally higher bandwidth world, the fight for eyeballs and 'audience share' has catalyzed an internet experience dominated by rich media and new tools to share experiences, collaborate, and entertain. It prompts the question: What can you provide to your target audience that will effectively capture their attention?

If you want to reach women, you will likely have to design specific strategies for them

5. R. Les Cottrell. "How Bad is Africa's Internet?" *IEEE Spectrum*. January 2013.
6. "Bigger Cities, Smaller Screens." Adam Clayton Powell. CIMA Media. June 2012.

7. Andre Croppenstedt, et al. "Gender and Agriculture: Inefficiencies, Segregation, and Low Productivity Traps." *The World Bank Research Observer*. FAO. 2013.
8. Intel Corporation. *Women and the Web*. January 2013.

Meanwhile, in metered environments, agricultural projects are looking at a different value proposition that favors data efficiency; shorter connection times, and transparency and tools to make clear how you are using audience bandwidth.[9] Often, metered users may favor text over images or video, which require much more intensive streams of data. In this situation, agricultural development practitioners have three basic choices: One option is to provide social media content and services that are so compelling that their target audiences will be willing to use precious funds or data to access them. The second option is to design tailored social media strategies that will build in demand creation for your content in other ways, such as providing phone credit, holding in-person events, or generating valuable new content. A third way is to focus on efficiency with low-data outreach, focusing especially on text.

This 'data crunch' is especially acute where the majority of users access social media via mobile phone. Of course, it can be a challenge to target both such audiences at once.

A FINAL NOTE: *As mobile devices grow in popularity, mobile data are becoming cheaper as well. In 2012, the average global price per MB of mobile data was US$0.03, down over 15 times from 2008. Current estimates from online research and promotion firm Jana Mobile suggest this number will fall to only a penny per MB by 2015.[10] Even at reduced prices, the bottom of the pyramid will still experience cost as a barrier, but the situation is improving.*

9. Marshini Chetty et al. Georgia Institute of Technology. "While the Meter is Running: Computing in a Capped World." *Interactions.* April 2011.
10. Jana Mobile. "Why the Mobile Web is not Just for Smartphones." *Infographic.* 2013.

HOW MARKET FORCES IMPACT USER EXPERIENCE

Bandwidth and data constraints are important because they can provide or restrict access to the global marketplace of ideas. But they are also variables that subtly or dramatically alter user behavior and impact the types of services people seek out. Understanding these drivers of user experience is essential to designing well-informed social media strategies.

Today, in countries with lesser connectivity there are myriad similar frustrations. One issue is that there is little extensive research examining social media use outside Europe and North America. But a growing body of qualitative research suggests that bandwidth, pricing, and other considerations notably shape Africans' online behavior in ways that are likely shared many others in the world.

In a study on social media use in rural Kenya, researchers found that participants were aware of social media sites like Facebook, and found access desirable for a host of reasons, including connecting for potential income generation. But the study population faced major barriers, including:

- irregular electricity availability and 'blackouts' (making internet access less important than saving the charge on their phone battery)
- the relatively high cost of connecting (participants kept an average of just KSh21 credit on their phone, roughly US$0.25)
- the low bandwidth, dated equipment, and slow loading times of a typical internet café[11]

11. Wyche, S.P., Schoenebeck, S.Y., and Forte, A. "'Facebook is a Luxury': An Exploratory Study of Social Media Use in Rural Kenya." *Proceedings of ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing* (CSCW'13). San Antonio, TX. 2013. http://www.susanwyche.com/paper441.pdf

Interestingly, these constraints shaped a different type of social media 'power user.' Internet café employees would wait until after business hours when speeds might improve with few users on the network. Others developed a strategy of browsing multiple web pages in a cascading fashion to maximize productivity, viewing one page as many others are loading.

In a second study by the same team exploring Facebook use in Nairobi's informal settlements, researchers concluded that Kenyan users used a strategy of consolidating highly diverse internet activities onto Facebook.[12]

From seeking employment, making international connections, marketing entrepreneurial efforts, chatting, being entertained, to even seeking international remittances, Facebook essentially became users' experience of 'the internet' as a whole.

Metered users may favor text over images or video, which require much more intensive streams of data

The financial case is particularly intriguing. The internet is full of e-commerce providers that facilitate online and mobile payments—but many like PayPal require a formal address and a bank account number. Where formal land titles and banking access are issues, these services are simply out of reach. Thus, users explored and utilized Facebook as a workaround.

12. Wyche, S.P., Forte, A. and Schoenebeck, S.Y. "Hustling Online: Understanding Consolidated Facebook Use in an Informal Settlement in Nairobi." *Proceedings of ACM SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (CHI'13). Paris, France. 2013.

ILLITERACY IS NO HURDLE, IT'S A WALL

According to UN estimates, approximately 800 million people are illiterate—or unable to read and write in their mother tongue.[13] For these people, text-based interface and navigation is largely a non-starter. While we live in an era of creative adaptive technology, the oft-suggested ICT illiteracy workarounds like voice-based or picture icon-oriented interfaces can be exceedingly complex to design and navigate. The following passage from CGAP, a think tank dedicated to advancing financial access for the world's poor, speaks to the trouble:

> Icons are in effect another form of alphabet and their meanings also need to be tested across user groups – challenging enough for a single user group, problematic when you're designing for a global roll-out. Concepts that may be new to the user group such as 'passwords' or 'withdrawing from an account' are problematic to articulate in iconic form. Audio interfaces need to support the users language and dialect, and assume that they understand what is being said, and are less appropriate in a range of contexts. Many of the environments where the services are used are highly noisy.[14]

Text-based illiteracy is just one part of the problem. Technical and numerical literacy also are significant limiting factors for the potential audience, utility, and specific feature sets of social media. If users can read but are completely unfamiliar with the internet, there will be a learning curve to account for. For the most part, agricultural practitioners can only target audiences that have the requisite skills to use social media, or they must develop programs to help target communities of users acquire those skills.

abc

800 million
people globally are
ILLITERATE

13. UN News Centre. "Literacy vital for beating poverty and disease and reinforcing stability" Sept 2011
14. Jan Chipcase. "For Mobile Banking, Lessons from Research into Illiteracy" CGAP Blog. Jan 2010
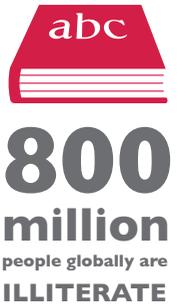
CONNECTING ACROSS THE DIVIDE

There is another compelling social media narrative in the developing world. It is the meteoric rise of mobile chat networks like Mxit (50 million total users) and WhatsApp (250 million monthly users and more than 20 billion messages per day), especially among the young. The paramount appeal of text chat is as a convenient and data efficient means of communication. These services aggregate many other messaging services (Yahoo, ICQ, Google Talk, Facebook, AIM, or Skype) across a multiple of devices into one seamless and virtually free experience (outside of data costs).

Despite widespread consumer usage, in researching and writing this handbook, the authors could not find an example of 'agriculture for development' that utilized new mobile chat networks, but we remain very confident that it is happening somewhere. Increasingly, these mobile chat platforms are becoming entire social networks with robust functionality unto themselves. Often these networks are centered on a more intimate circle of friends than older social networks, but there are examples from other sectors of development outreach. One such example: South African open-source textbook publisher Siyavula is distributing free math and science textbooks on Mxit, reaching 450,000 users to date.

RISING COMPETITION FOR SHORTER ATTENTION SPANS

With the important caveat of the need for compelling content, social media have important advantages over other types of communication. They don't require the coordination, lead time, and loss of control involved in journalistic media coverage. If well-executed, social media can be easier to share. It can also be more widely relatable than technical

> The trend across social networks is for more visual content

reports or traditional project success stories. Further, social can be a more trustworthy and cost-effective messaging channel than advertising, if you can get your audience to share your content virally. Engaging this broader network is critical, because we know that recommendations from peers can greatly increase interest and trust in content from a broader audience.

The advertising world has collected extensive data on the value of such recommendations.

> After surveying 28,000 internet respondents in 56 countries for their 2012 Global Trust in Advertising report, Nielson concluded that 92 percent of consumers say they trust recommendations from friends and family, above all other forms of advertising.[15]

92%

92 percent of consumers say they trust recommendations from friends and family

15. Nielsen Group. *Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages*. April 2012.
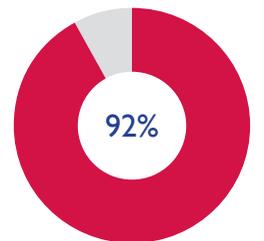
In the past decade, there are many high profile examples of advocacy campaigns that have gone 'viral'– but by focusing on these rare successes, one can acquire a skewed picture of the ease and frequency with which viral campaigns succeed. Quality social media work requires time, budget, the right subject matter, and most importantly, cross-platform commitment required to build a buzz about one's message.

The single channel social media campaign (e.g., depending on Facebook or Twitter alone as a program strategy) is increasingly ineffective. The answer is to diversify your social media outreach when it makes sense, and to ensure that your efforts are integrated effectively.

On increasingly busy platforms, it is essential to build a multi-channel campaign that embraces a 'wall of sound' approach. Any one channel or platform should complement and integrate with careful communications planning and traditional means of community and media outreach. To manage such a potentially unwieldy effort, your goals need to be exceptionally clear. Think about the strategic imperative and ask yourself: who, what, how, when, where? And above all: why? Resources in Component 3 will help you through this process.

It is essential to build a multi-channel campaign that embraces a 'wall of sound' approach

THE DELUGE OF DATA

While there are many new opportunities for increasing transparency, broadening community participation, facilitating trade, and boosting collaboration within organizations, the deluge of trackable data created in social media can create significant knowledge management issues. Organizations in many sectors struggle to gather, sort, record, and classify the ongoing wave of information. This is especially true of government

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A Note on Third-Party Access Limitations

Even if one understands a target audience's capability and capacity with social media, aligning appropriate approaches, other unexpected hurdles can crop up. The internet can seem like an open network, but in reality it is thousands of small ones with local rules and gatekeepers, including governments and service providers.

An example: A common practice on microblogs like Twitter is to use URL shorteners—services that take long links and minimize them for easier reading and to save space. Many websites and services have their own built-in URL shorteners, as a convenience. But at press time, reports from Ethiopia, for

example, indicate that some of these tools are inaccessible. It is not uncommon for governments, ISPs, and other players to limit access to certain websites or services. These restrictions vary greatly from place to place.

Further, even more intrusive measures such as data mining can be an issue for users accessing your content in their home countries if this content is perceived as sensitive in a political or social context. It is important to always do your homework on any local internet restrictions and conditions that may exist in the countries where you are working.

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initiatives, and of government funded projects with specific reporting and external communications goals.

Further, much of this information is structured differently than the Word documents and Excel spreadsheets of yore. Because of the rapid jump in social media participation, many projects simply have gigabytes of unprocessed data in archives, afraid to delete them—but unclear on what to do with them. The importance of clear monitoring and evaluation planning becomes even more essential in this overflowing data environment, in order to most effectively record, synthesize, and separate the desired signal from the unwanted noise.

Many projects simply have gigabytes of unprocessed data in archives

But let's also be clear about its immediate use in agricultural development: Until a critical mass of mobile devices, internet connectivity, and locally affordable data make their way to developing world farmers in the field, social media will remain limited. In this interim, it is the agricultural professionals a layer above that may benefit: extension officers, program staff, urbanites who may be aligned with your project objectives, students, and others who can freely travel to locations where connectivity is available.

It is imperative to take a good look at whether your target audience is already accessing social media tools and platforms. If they are not, be realistic about what it might take for social media to be useful. Setting up a Facebook page to engage audiences outside of your target is of very little value in the long run.

That is not to discount the value of social media in the near future. But it is a caution. With every flashy new social media feature, platform, or app offering, a seasoned social media communicator will hear alarm bells ring with the knowledge that someone is going to figure out how to creatively exploit that interesting new feature for their own project ends. This underscores the value of your goals. Stick to them, and alter your tactics as needed. The following components will help you think through next steps.

FURTHER RESOURCE: Though visually simple, the newly updated online FAO Social Media for Development Course does a good job of covering the basics of getting started in social media. Recommended.

> If your target audience isn't already accessing social media tools and platforms, be realistic about what it might take for social media to be useful

A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

What they say is true. Social media are new forms of communication that are global, interactive, and immediate. They have revolutionized journalism, political, and social discourse. They also have profound implications for how we communicate, organize, and behave—both online and offline.

Some social services already appear to have a significant amount of pent up demand. In a 2013 Mobile Life study, the media research firm TNS found that 19 percent of the world's mobile users were already using location-based services, but 62 percent of non-users aspired to do so in the future.[16] It is not difficult to imagine the unique value of GPS-embedded photos, social mapping, and geo-located social check-ins in agricultural development work.

19%

19 percent of the world's mobile users were already using location-based services

16. TNS Global. 2013 Mobile Life Report.

> *"Great things are done not by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together."*
>
> *~ Vincent van Gogh*

SOCIAL PLATFORM PREVIEWS

Below is a brief overview of 11 of the top global social media platforms, platform categories, tools, and their most common uses to catalyze your brainstorming. These platforms were selected from among the Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies Top 100 Tools. Though not prescriptive, we aimed to focus on what may be most useful for development projects in the next several years. You may find that niche-specific, regional or other newly launched platforms better suit your goals.

1. *Facebook*
Social network

OVERVIEW: Simply put, Facebook is the most comprehensive social platform on the internet. With over one billion profiles globally, Facebook enables its exceptionally active user base to freely share information about their lives, particularly through pictures and video. Users access a wide array of functions, including phone, chat, payment, and login,[17] to meaningfully connect both through Facebook's website and across the internet via plugins on other websites.

Facebook provides a number of useful features for community building. First, it is an extremely helpful tool for meeting new people, especially 'friends of friends' who may be interested in connecting by association. Communities can be grown via Pages, Events, and Groups. Though fluid, Pages are typically used to showcase specific 'brands,' while the functionality of Groups better supports discussion and community. Events are a useful and easy way to gain attention for your community happenings. Coupled with Facebook Ads, which can drill down into very specific demographic slivers and affinity groups within virtually any population, it is relatively simple to grow you audience on the site. But the question then becomes: How do you engage with those folks in meaningful ways—and what will keep them engaged when you stop your ad spending? Many projects are finding it increasingly difficult.[18]

17. Facebook Login provides a way to users to sign in to any participating app or website by using the Facebook verification architecture. Essentially, it means new users do not have to fill out their personal details in many places around the web.

18. John Hayden. "Five Reasons Why Facebook Marketing Seems So Impossible." Getting Attention Blog. June 2013.

USER PROFILE: It started on college campuses in the United States, but is now a global phenomenon across all demographic categories under the age of 65. There is a large variety of ways to access the site, via desktop, tablet, smartphone, and increasingly mobile phone. Facebook offers a text only version called Facebook Zero and a Java-based app for feature phones called Facebook for Every Phone, which works on 3,000 phone models. Both of these are proving to be particularly popular in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where these less data heavy versions can save precious phone credit.

MOST COMMON USAGES: connecting, sharing, chatting, learning

CONSIDERATIONS: Facebook is betting heavily on the future of its platform on mobile phones. Once a desktop-only experience, Facebook apps are increasingly replacing the website as the public's favorite way of checking in. This is especially true in places without widespread desktop computing resources.

The site also gives preferential exposure to different types of content—but this preference is fickle and often changes without warning. The platform once favored video, but now seems to favor images (but not images of text or documents). Facebook is well known for making dramatic changes in site behavior overnight, making it a strategic bet on a project's ability and willingness to be responsive. [See FACET project case study in Component 2].

EXAMPLE: E-Agriculture

RESOURCE: Connecting with Supporters on Facebook

2. *Twitter*
Social network and micro-blogging service

OVERVIEW: At the beginning of 2013, it was widely reported that Twitter was the fastest growing social network in the world, and is available in 25 languages, including right to left languages like Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, and Hebrew. The service enables users to send short 140-character messages ("tweets") to each other along with linked and images. Twitter was created in March 2006, and today it claims to have 500 million registered users, with some 288 million active users, generating over 400 million tweets daily. Roughly a quarter of those messages are re-tweets, where one user shares another's message with their own followers. This is a unique feature set of Twitter: the ease with which favorite content can spread virally outside the immediate circle of ones' followers. Tweets are generally public, with non-registrants being able to read them on the web-based platform, unless user private preferences 'lock down' an account for approved followers only. Twitter is the go-to place for breaking news (and unconfirmed rumors) around the world, accessible by searching specific event or topic-specific hashtags, which 'trend' as they grow in popularity. In the agriculture and development communities, Twitter has taken on a special role as a 'town square' of sorts; where connected users need not be bi-directional 'friends,' but can instead opt to 'follow' each other in a one-way fashion.

USER PROFILE: Increasingly popular among all demographics, but skewed toward young users initially.

MOST COMMON USAGES: broadcasting, discussing, debating, retweeting

TWITTER TAXONOMY

User names start with '@', such as @ICTforAg

Hashtags start with '#', such as #agriculture

CONSIDERATIONS: Due to Twitter's constrained message sizes, it takes some practice to become 'fluent' on Twitter. A wide array of abbreviations, lingo, and designations will become easier to read and write after some practice (for further information, see resources below), but you will also just become more concise. In addition, the 'real time' nature of Twitter results in placing higher value on responsiveness than perhaps any other channel.

EXAMPLES:
Calestous Juma - @calestous
One Acre Fund - @OneAcreFund

RESOURCES:
USAID's Agrilinks 101 and 102-level Twitter Trainings

Twitter Best Practices (PDF-download link) By Alanna Shaikh

3. LinkedIn
Professional social network

OVERVIEW: LinkedIn is an elder of currently booming social media networks. Founded in 2003, LinkedIn has 225 million global members and is a tremendous resource for job seekers and headhunters. The reason to list LinkedIn here is that it has cultivated a collection of 1.3 million Groups, but most social activity congregates in just 5 percent of them. The best Groups are very active places for conversation and drive a disproportionate amount of referral traffic to outside sources. LinkedIn is an oft-overlooked resource to cross-post on, build project reputations, and boost traffic to other platforms.

USER PROFILE: business people, students, and job hunters. Most common usages: connecting, browsing, conversing, endorsing

CONSIDERATIONS: Although Twitter is perhaps the least formal of social networks, LinkedIn is considerably more buttoned up. This is no surprise, considering its direct relationship to potential job opportunities and employers.

EXAMPLES:
Rural Development Network

Young Professionals' Platform for Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD)

RESOURCES: Mashable's A Beginners Guide to LinkedIn

4. Google+ / Hangouts
Social network and video meeting service

OVERVIEW: Early social networking efforts by Google fizzled. From the carcass of Google Wave and Google Buzz came Google+ in 2011. The site has a similar profile setup to Facebook, to share photos and video and gather your friends in different categories.

Google+ has three very interesting attributes. First, unlike other conventional social networks that are accessible through a single website and a small number of plugins and apps, Google+ is a 'social layer' that

Your presence
and activity on
Google+ appears
to improve your
standing in the
company's all
important search
rankings

leverages and enhances many different Google services.

Second, your presence and activity on Google+ appears to improve your standing in the company's all important search rankings. Why does this matter? Because according to ComScore, as of December 2012, some 65 percent of all internet searches in the world are done via Google. By itself, the company can direct an enormous amount of traffic to your online platforms and content. Second on that list: China's massive website Baidu, with just 8.2 percent of the organic search market share.

Third, and perhaps most useful: Hangouts is an instant messaging and video chat platform that allows for seamless conversations with up to 10 people at a time. It is perhaps the most user-friendly video conference application on the internet, and its integration with other Google properties like Gmail makes it very useful.

USER PROFILE: early adopters, professional communicators, virtually everyone who interacts with Google beyond search

MOST COMMON USAGES: connecting, recommending content (+1s), video/text chatting

CONSIDERATIONS: Many preexisting Google users 'opted in' at the Google+ launch, only to see their attentions drift back to other social networks in time. For now, Google+ is a complementary channel with significant benefits and enough access to other Google services to continue to grow.

RESOURCE: The guide to Google+ for business

5. *Pinterest*
Image-sharing

OVERVIEW: Launched in 2010, Pinterest is a pinboard-style social network of visuals. To date, it has approximately 50 million users worldwide and growing. Pinterest users 'pin' images to share on their personal boards, and they can search terms on particular tags to find relevant imagery. Eighty percent of images are 'repinned' from other Pinterest users' pages, reflecting Pinterest's greater ease of sharing as compared to other sites.

Although Pinterest has a reputation for catering to young, Western, female audiences, the site's reach and content mix have since broadened considerably. One distinctive feature is its particularly rich display of complex and detailed infographics. The ability of third-party services like Pinstamatic to graphically represent different types of information from all over the internet is another boon to the platform.

USER PROFILE: young women, enthusiasts of all stripes, visual learners
Most common usages: Browsing, learning, cataloging ideas

CONSIDERATIONS: This platform doesn't work unless you fully embrace and get creative with visual content. It also rewards quality curation over quantity. Pinterest is an audience full of curious people looking for inspiration and ideas.

EXAMPLE: Emeka Okoye's African Technology Board

RESOURCE: Pinterest's "Pinning 101"

6. *YouTube/Vimeo/DailyMotion/MetaCafe*
Video-on-Demand

OVERVIEW: Seeing is believing. Video is an incredibly powerful tool, inspiring higher rates of message credibility and virality. As the cost of video equipment drops precipitously, and mobile phones acquire higher quality video capture functionality, the format has become a more accessible way to frame your message.

The increasing global popularity of video sharing websites is a sure sign that bandwidth availability is increasing, since video transmission requires much more data usage than text or images. The largest video sharing site, YouTube, is staggering in its scale. Localized in 56 countries and across 61 languages, the site currently receives more than one billion unique visitors a month. Users view six billion hours of video per month. That's almost an hour per month for every single person on the planet.[19]

YouTube also allows users to upload, edit, and caption a video directly onto the site. Although this rich functionality will likely struggle in lower-bandwidth settings, other useful features allow you to filter, stabilize, slo-mo, or blur facial features within the YouTube editor. A host of other competitors have their specific audiences, with Vimeo (a creative-centric community favoring HD), DailyMotion (pop-culture and ad-driven), and MetaCafe (packaged entertainment).

USER PROFILE: everyone with available bandwidth

MOST COMMON USAGES: viewing, sharing, entertaining, linking, user-generated video storage

CONSIDERATIONS:
Unless you capture breaking news, no one enjoys a shaky or poorly produced video. It is important to commit to the planning or storyboarding process. Regardless of the hardware and software you use, it can often require more effort than originally planned. If you work for a non-profit based in the United States, look into the YouTube Non-Profit Program, which can provide valuable marketing benefits.

EXAMPLES: Digital Green has over 2,700 agricultural videos on their YouTube channel.

RESOURCES: If working on a specific campaign, a good resource for getting started is the YouTube Playbook for Good.

To learn how to produce great videos, see USAID's FACET Low-Cost Video Toolkit for Agricultural Development Practitioners.

Video is an incredibly powerful tool, inspiring higher rates of message credibility and virality

19. Statistics provided by YouTube. June 2013.

7. *[Flickr](#)/[Picasa](#)/[Instagram](#)/[Vine](#)*
Photo and micro-video hosting and sharing

OVERVIEW: Flickr and Picasa are very popular photo sharing sites with robust functionality native to desktop computers, via browser and desktop application. Both sites allow users to share and embed personal photographs, creating an online community who respond and share each other images. Many bloggers use these sites to host photos for embedding in outside websites and posts.

But as the internet becomes more visual, new photo sharing (and increasingly, short video) sites have ridden the wave to mass audiences. Driven by smart and seamless smartphone mobile apps, a new generation of users is embracing photo sharing for new purposes.

In this very competitive context, Picasa (owned by Google) and Flickr (owned by Yahoo) are attempting to transition to mobile, while native to mobile services like Instagram (owned by Facebook) offer popular new features such as 'filters' that can make pictures look vintage, avant-garde, or otherwise photoshopped. Both Instagram and Vine (owned by Twitter) capture and edit short video clips (6 to 12 seconds) that can be viewed on the web, but can only be captured and uploaded by mobile.

USER PROFILE: either via website, mobile app, or social media, basically all high bandwidth internet users

MOST COMMON USAGES: shooting, viewing, watching, commenting, sharing

CONSIDERATIONS: In some ways it doesn't matter where your photos live, but that they will 'follow' you around the web via embed. But each of the internet Goliaths seems to be pondering the level of integration that is best for their business purposes. Both Twitter and Facebook have taken measures to limit direct embed of each others' subsidiary content. The recent Flickr redesign adds an elegant new 'infinitely scrolling' display and offers a full terabyte of free storage. Picasa is increasingly integrated into Google+, and may simply become part of it.

RESOURCE: To get a sense of micro-video, read this post by PBS's IdeaLab: "[How Journalists Can Use Vine](#)."

As the internet becomes more visual, new photo sharing (and increasingly, short video) sites have ridden the wave to mass audiences.

8. *Wikipedia/Quora*
   Knowledge Sharing

OVERVIEW: Wikipedia is one of the world's most popular websites, attracting more than 500 million unique visitors per month and a remarkable 3 billion mobile page views. It is a multilingual, free-content encyclopedia project operated by the Wikimedia Foundation that allows any credentialed user to edit text via real identity or pseudonym. A highly engaged online community creates listings and edits, in addition to maintaining order on the site. In general, it is a surprising when you encounter a topic without a substantial listing on the site.

Quora (founded in 2011) is one of a new generation of social 'question-and-answer' sites focusing on 'evergreen' or lasting content and 'big picture' ideas. It is still relatively small (2.9 million monthly unique users), but has effectively cultivated a burgeoning, highly influential (industry insiders, scientists, and PhDs), and thoughtful group of core users. The audience generates questions, and answers provided can be voted up or down by the community. Users earn credits whenever you add interesting content other people on the site appreciate, and the voting system ensures that the best content is accessible to readers first.

USER PROFILE: Wikipedia: everyone   Quora: early adopters

MOST COMMON USAGES: researching, learning, editing, asking, answering

CONSIDERATIONS: Wikipedia still drives a large amount of traffic to links embedded in its entries. If one chooses to list projects on Wikipedia, it would be wise to use their new mobile app 'tracking' feature on to update you whenever new changes are made to the listing. Quora is in its early days (and hasn't rolled out a revenue model as yet), but appears to be here to stay.

EXAMPLE: Wikipedia page on information and communications technology for development

Quora page on trending discussions in Agriculture

RESOURCES: A smart overview of the impact of using Wikipedia to boost awareness and web traffic from the Ball State University Digital Media Repository.[20]

9. *Scribd/Issuu*
   Document Publishing

OVERVIEW: In the online publishing business, there are numerous options. In terms of traffic and users, Scribd attracts the most eyeballs and allows users to view, print, download and upload documents in a variety of formats including PDF and Word. Designed as more of an academic platform, Scribd is conducive to large document uploads, offering both free and paid versions including the opportunity to purchase or sell documents as well. The site allows you to easily embed your uploaded documents right within your website.

20. Michael Szajewski. "Using Wikipedia to Enhance the Visibility of Digitized Archival Assets" D-Lib Magazine. April 2013.

Issuu is a similar site that offers a very realistic, customizable, and visually pleasing desktop reading experience, but with less developed embed functions (it works with Wordpress sites, but struggles with others). Also, it places heavier emphasis on the curating function within the site, enabling users to follow 'stacks' that specific users assemble and maintain.

USER PROFILE: professionals

MOST COMMON USAGES: publishing, sharing, collaborating, editing

CONSIDERATIONS: Scribd is the market leader here, so if dissemination and downloads is a key indicator, your well-tagged documents will likely see the most exposure there. If reading experience and browsability is your priority, Issuu has a leg up, especially with its iPad app.

EXAMPLES:
The World Bank's Africa Channel on Scribd

International Fertilizer Development Center's (IFDC) collection on Issuu

10. Slideshare/Prezi
Online presentation sharing

OVERVIEW: SlideShare is a business media site with some social functionality. Users can upload files privately or publicly in PowerPoint, PDF, Keynote, or OpenOffice and share them with connections and subscribers.

Founded in 2006 and owned by LinkedIn, the site receives about 58 million unique viewers per month. It also allows users to upload audio that they can synchronize with their presentations for a narrated viewer experience. Prezi describes itself as an online storytelling tool, adding elements of video and audio, as well as movement and zoom to the well-worn digital presentation format. Using the cloud-based software, free users can create public 'online tours' for their ideas, while paid users can also create in private and brand the product as their own.

USER PROFILE: professionals, students

MOST COMMON USAGES: sharing, collaborating, editing

CONSIDERATIONS: Slideshare has unusually good search engine optimization, so that its content often appears high in Google search rankings. That is a significant advantage of the platform. Prezi is still unfamiliar to many, and presentations created on the site generate reactions ranging from amazement to nausea. It is best to be judicious when using the zooming options.

EXAMPLES:
FACET Prezi on the use of mobile, radio, and low cost video in agriculture

IFPRI South Asia's SlideShare Channel

RESOURCES: Getting Started with Prezi

Using the cloud-based software, free users can create public 'online tours' for their ideas

11. *SoundCloud*
Online audio sharing

OVERVIEW: With currently 38 million monthly users (and estimates to hit 55 million by the end of 2013), SoundCloud is the "world's fastest growing sound platform." Originally popular among the electronic music set for public mixtapes and private collaboration, the site is increasingly a music and podcasting discovery tool. Artists can upload audio and receive a unique URL. Artists can set permissions to make music streamable, downloadable, or both. Registered users can insert comments to music clips and embed via its 'stratus player' to a host of social media networks like Facebook, Tumblr, and Pinterest.

USER PROFILE: young people, music enthusiasts, information junkies

MOST COMMON USAGES: listening, sharing, collaborating, editing

EXAMPLE: Farm Radio International

RESOURCE: SoundCloud 101's "Basics to Get You Started"

Are there other social media platforms that your target groups are using that have not been listed here? If so, use the following form to add it here (and send your contributions our way!):

Name	
Overview	
User profile	
Most common usages	
Considerations	
Resources	

2

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

GOALS

When you finish this component, you will have

- Explored a variety of examples for the use of social media in agriculture and low-bandwidth environments

In practical terms, most of the tools and tactics of social media are easy to learn. But like many forms of communication that preceded it, social media will take a lifetime to master. In fact, even that may be too simplistic. It may not ever be 'masterable' in any conventional sense for agricultural development practitioners.

The fact is that things are changing too quickly. Unlike cave drawings, narrative fiction, or newspaper journalism, the pace of change in modern social channels and tools is constantly accelerating with no sign of stopping. This makes social media 'mastery' a somewhat fleeting state of mind.

Part of the process is getting comfortable with experimentation in achieving your objectives. Looking forward, just as we've seen in the past, there will always be some new platform, application, or interaction design just around the corner. This has broad implications: Although no development project communications strategy can change quarterly to cater to early adopters of new technologies, it is critical that projects build flexibility into their plans. As detailed in Component 1, constant change is the norm online.

Many factors will have an impact on how you find success online, from the quality of your content, your effectiveness in establishing personal

relevance to your audience, the existing competition for their attention, to the access you secure with partnerships and on social platforms that are constantly making major changes.

Thus, over the long term, your goals and strategy matter more than your tactics. The key is to harness that restless spirit of social media to best suit your project objectives. For practitioners, that nagging sense of being 'behind the times' will only be mitigated by following best practices and keeping one's eyes open, but it will never be gone entirely.

Like any other communication approach, it is helpful to highlight good and bad examples of previous work. Numerous high-quality case studies on the internet of good social media practice exist, but there is an order of magnitude, more examples of social efforts with low engagement, generating little notice, and doing little good.

Institutions like the Pew Research Center have extensively chronicled online behavior in places with the most robust online infrastructure. But basic data is lacking for much of the rest of the world. Because social media efforts in the development space often target audiences outside the bubble of relatively convenient, fast, and inexpensive connectivity of the 'developed' context, you must do your homework.

To succeed, it is essential to examine closely the online behavior of those you want to reach, the successes or failures of those who have tried it before you, and perhaps most importantly, to use the data you do know to make calculated guesses about what you don't.

What follows is a set of examples that can help you frame your goals and guide your ambitions against what is possible with social media.

The pace of change in modern social channels and tools is constantly accelerating

With a little experimentation, and a lot of practice, you could improve upon every single one in the very near future. That's how quickly things are changing.

IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY

USAID's FACET Project *– Knowledge Sharing and Technical Assistance for USAID missions and implementers working in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa*

This case study aims to provide some insight into the ways that social media can enhance certain development project functions, as well as leveling with the reader about the potential constraints, risks, and barriers presented by the social methods of communicating across audiences, platforms, and continents. It will be particularly relevant to those thinking about online communications between and among development implementers based in more connected countries than target audiences in the less connected places of the world.

THE 2012–2013 FACET PROJECT EXPERIENCE

As noted in the introduction, FACET is a technical assistance and information-sharing project funded by USAID. In short, we aim to help USAID-funded projects and missions in sub-Saharan Africa with the resources and expertise they need to effectively integrate information and communications technologies into their agricultural efforts.

All of our project social media efforts (at time of writing in summer 2013) fit within that basic framework—a broad mandate to serve as an information and technical resource within our sector, with a heavy emphasis on practitioners in the field in sub-Saharan Africa. To this end, we use social media to learn about and highlight best practices in the field, disseminate FACET knowledge products, promote and coordinate in-person events, and engage the broader global agriculture and technology for development community.

TIMELINE

In April 2012, the project hired a social communications specialist who was tasked with creating an internet strategy based on a project website, email marketing, an expert blog, and a social media presence. As part of an initial landscape assessment, the team took stock of existing assets, personnel availability, primary and secondary audiences, and the project timeline to craft the digital communications objectives listed below.

Those objectives dictated several unconventional tactics for USAID projects. The first involved project branding. Although FACET is a fine project name, it didn't instantaneously communicate our purpose in social forums without further explanation. In anticipation of this problem, the project reserved the handle 'ICT for Ag' on several channels, including Facebook and Twitter. The new name played an integral role in informing our audience immediately of what we were about and why we were important, thus enabling us to carve out a niche online.

Our objectives also occasionally shifted to meet specific needs or constraints. For example, in the spring of 2012, the blog concept was put aside because at the time our website was only accessible to site

registrants, which was a very small audience. This was later changed, allowing for open access to anyone on the internet, but at the time it made writing for our own website audience of very little value. If links were circulated via social media, for example, readers would have to create new accounts. This meant that if we linked back to our site via social media, for example, potential readers would have to create new user accounts to access the content. Thus, the strategy evolved into pushing our short form posts to higher visibility partner sites and media outlets.

OBJECTIVES FOR FACET'S SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

1. Awareness-building of FACET knowledge products, primarily among field practitioners

In the initial two years of the project (2010–2012), the FACET team produced a large number of knowledge products in digital and print formats, ranging from one-page profiles of key organizations and applications in the sector, briefing papers on the burning topics in ICT for agriculture, and toolkits that are crafted for practitioner audiences. Although largely unseen before April 2012, due to limited resources, lack of a dynamic website, and minimal content marketing, those knowledge materials proved valuable content assets to build a larger community. Thus, social media channels were sought to help broadcast and disseminate vital information.

2. Establish thought leadership

Though our knowledge products were always at the center of online content strategy, we didn't limit our channels strictly to content developed by the project. Instead, we actively curated content from around the web that we believed would capture audience interest. The FACET team

specialized in content curation in three broad subject areas: Africa, Agriculture, and Technology. We curated content from a full breadth of the internet—from internet chat sites, student blogs, and photo sharing sites, to more traditional media outlets. In short, if we felt that an item was compelling enough, then it was worthy of sharing with our audience, even if it wasn't directly connected to our mandate. This highlights an important point: Being at the center of quality online conversations, even if it strays from a narrow topical area, can be vital to creating an engaged audience.

Our team also had great success in creating tailored and cross-posted text, photo, video, and multimedia content that aided our social media channels, either directly or indirectly. The FACET team collaborated on partnerships with a number of organizations, including other USAID implementing teams (USAID Digital Communications, Agrilinks.org, C-Change.org), like-minded organizations and projects (e-Agriculture.org, FHI 360, Farm Radio International, C-Hub), and media outlets (The Guardian, ICTworks), which helped provide forums for our content, promote our events, and create a buzz around the use of information and communications technology in Africa.

The FACET team specialized in content curation in three broad subject areas: Africa, Agriculture, and Technology

FACET

3. Create online communities in support of online and offline activities
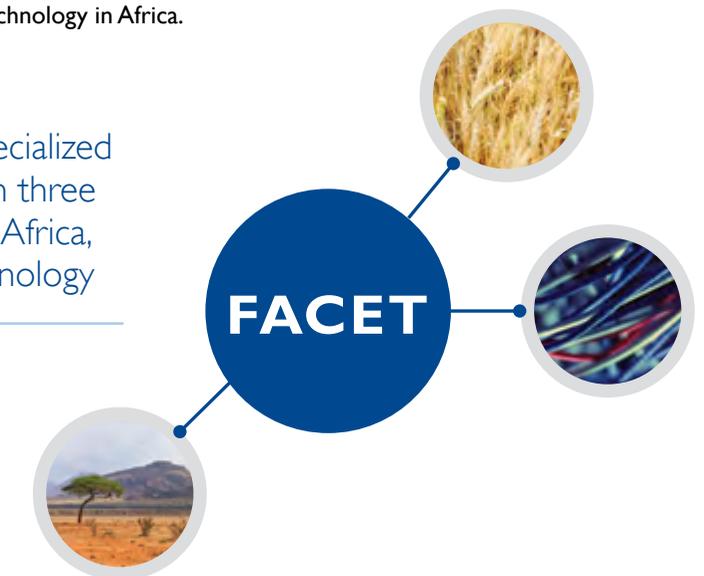
Our Facebook and Twitter communities significantly promoted our offline conference attendance, workshops, and live events in ways that were often difficult to quantify. The FACET team created specific imagery, online content, polls, and even multimedia presentations, to promote specific events and activities.

Notably, the dynamic also worked in reverse. The FACET team used participation at in-person events as opportunities to promote our social media presence as well. We prepared local language-appropriate fliers for big events, and made sure to consistently plug our social channels at every presentation, media mention, and webinar attended. Although online communities can sometimes earn the criticism for cultivating "slacktivism" (such as gathering large online audiences with low real world engagement), we found that recruiting social followers in-person led to the largest spikes in our followings and website traffic.

4. Collaboration and feedback from our constituents and colleagues

The FACET team previewed some of our most important knowledge products, such as the interactive radio toolkit, in 'web-first beta' for a set duration of time with significant promotion and outreach on Facebook and Twitter. This opened up the content for comment to our social media channels, the practitioner community, and the public. Though the level of feedback only amounted to a handful of people, it did help us increase the quality of our knowledge products and get to know the needs of our audience.

We also built relationships over social media that became central to our project communications, such as an ongoing content partnership with

Projeqt Multimedia Presentations

'Face Behind the App' Webinar Recordings
- Kilimo Salama
- Freedom Fone

KILIMO SALAMA   FREEDOM FONE

USAID's Agrilinks that resulted in two popular cross-branded multimedia presentations on the web platform Projeqt and corresponding 'Face Behind the App' webinar events.

Further, our social channels have provided an invaluable way for us to stay on top of the changing landscape of agriculture and technology globally. A frequent complaint of development projects is the silo between home office and in-country information. For us, social media proved to be a remarkable tool for breaking down those barriers.

KEY CONSTRAINTS

Limited and Shifting Timetable
As the internet strategy was initially envisioned, the project would end in just six months, so it restricted longer term strategic thinking in favor of immediate visibility.

Budget and Staff Time

Because social media is generally cheaper than print or website creation, many think of it as free. In reality, it does require staff time and effort to develop effective content. The internet is a hungry beast, and social media requires constant care and feeding.

FACET was a very small project team (for much of its past year, just two full-time staffers with many responsibilities beyond social media), thus budget considerations certainly informed our social media priorities. Budget had an impact on how many platforms we could cover, how frequently we could develop our own content, and how to balance other work objectives, including numerous trips to sub-Saharan Africa to provide technical assistance.

Projects often come to believe that because they succeed in adding to the scientific literature, or produce solid narrative success stories, that those efforts have value online. In fact, regardless of whether offices are chock full of hard copy reports, or have gigabytes worth of those same reports in "digital soft copy" (e.g., PDF), it can be a lengthy process to ready that content for the internet. Neither format is very useful for most social media channels—requiring synthesis, contextualization, and packaging for online audiences. The important part is unlocking the palatable bits of information that can engage audiences and link back to further resources. That requires staff time that is not always readily available.

Development industry sensitivities vis-a-vis the internet

There are several issues that contribute to project reluctance to engage deeply in social media. The first is cultural and linguistic. There is an inherent tension between the technical language of international development discourse and the informal, plainspoken nature of the internet. Development lingo is just as often a target of mockery online as a source of positive engagement.

Further, project managers are often reluctant to provide an official project social media presence that can act as a lightning rod for any criticism or critique from the online masses—fair or not, specific or completely misdirected.

It is also notable that USAID itself is still evolving in its social media guidance. Like every development agency, it is working within a new reality: These tools enable dialogue, engagement, and criticism of foreign aid and international development work on a vast new scale. Intuitively, the FACET team understood that for social media to make a real difference to the

These tools enable dialogue, engagement, and criticism of foreign aid and international development work

project, it had to find a fertile middle ground between technical knowledge products and expertise, the necessity of concise online communication and the informal voice of the internet.

HOW FACET MONITORED SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Website Download Traffic

Our social media channels have been quite successful in achieving our project goals. In the first quarter after launching our social media channels (Fall 2012), downloads of FACET knowledge products jumped almost five-fold, from an average of 48 downloads per document per month to 235 downloads per document per month. In the months that followed, document downloads remained well above their pre-social media levels.

On Twitter

To date, our Twitter account has more than 1,350 fans, and is a very active presence in the ICT4D, food security, and agriculture communities. As of this writing, the @ICTforAg average weekly reach (e.g., number of accounts encountering our tweets in their feed) is 71,240 people. Further, the quality of our followers is worth noting, with some of the world's leading organizations, academics, and practitioners of agriculture, development, and information technology frequently sharing our content with their audiences.

On Facebook

The ICT for Ag Facebook Page has attracted nearly 2,200 fans, but it has been more of a mixed success, based on significant changes to the platform over the life of our efforts. In past years, Facebook has been

a powerful free tool to brand projects, but its utility is increasingly tied to revenue generation for the company itself. In May and June 2012, the FACET team invested a small amount of funds to attract our target audience to the Page via Facebook Ads. Our team designed and A/B tested a variety of key messages designed to connect with different audiences, in different countries, on a variety of topics. Because it is so inexpensive to conduct these tests, and the targeting can be so granular, it gives projects a real opportunity to find their audience. Perhaps most importantly, we also designed messages for men ('xy messages') and women ('xx messages') separately; as a gender imbalance quickly became noticeable among our fans (to date, 87 percent of fans are male).

At a cost of US$1 per day, ICT for Ag added fans at a remarkable pace—at approximately 7 cents per fan (the cost was low because there was little competition for ad space we requested). In the end, we added 1,029 fans at a cost of just under US$72. This push got the Page off to a terrific start with high levels of engagement and interest in FACET's work, especially our pre-existing knowledge products.

Ad Preview	Targeting
ICT for Ag Your source for ICT for agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. 2,233 people like ICT for Ag. View on Right Hand Side • Create a Similar Ad	This ad targets 82,000 people: • who live in one of the countries: Senegal, Uganda, Tanzania, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Namibia, Madagascar, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, Benin, Mozambique, Mali, Burkina Faso, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia, Chad, Kenya or Ghana • 56 years old and younger • who like #Agriculture ministry, #Food security, #Sustainable living, #Sustainable agriculture, #MHealth, #Biodynamic agriculture, #Organic farming, #Natural resource management, #Soil Association, #Geographic information system, #Permaculture or #Rural development • who are not already connected to ICT for Ag

Here is an example of a broadly targeted ICT for Ag "xx message" on Facebook Ads. Notice the level of detail in search terms that you can target.

The unfortunate part of the story: It didn't last. As our audience grew, Facebook decided to change the basic value proposition, limiting access to the fans we had accumulated. In August 2012, the company significantly restricted 'free' exposure of our posts to our fans. Our reach dropped abruptly from approximately 540 fans per post, to approximately 250. Correspondingly, our high levels of engagement and buzz didn't continue, settling instead into more of a low-level hum.

ON MEASURING ONLINE INFLUENCE

Though nascent, secretive, and proprietary, cross-channel online influence measurement is improving with each passing year. It can provide a useful form of feedback to determine the effectiveness of your social media efforts. The industry leader in influence measurement at press time is Klout. Many early adopter companies are using it to target offers to their most influential audience members. At the time of writing (June 2013) ICT for Ag maintains a very high Klout Score (**61.44** in June 2013) for a USAID project. That score is much more in line with entire development organizations:

- FHI 360: **63**
- ACDI-VOCA: **57**
- Chemonics **45**

USAID key bureaus

- USAID for Global Health: **67**
- Feed the Future: **64**
- USAID Asia: **51**
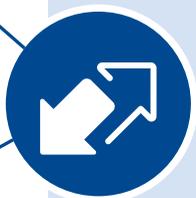
LESSONS LEARNED
(AND CHANGES WE WILL MAKE NEXT TIME)

Focus on smart metrics instead of vanity metrics
There are vast amounts of analytic data available on social channels, and so many free and paid collection tools that projects often get overwhelmed. But tracking simple raw data, e.g. 'likes' and RTs, leaves much to be desired in terms of actually evaluating success or failure. The trick is to align your metrics with your actual project goals.

For example: What is the more relevant measure of your content engagement—'Likes' per Facebook post, or the number of positive interactions (likes and shares) per post per 1,000 fans? The ratio will do a better job of creating a consistent value that will inform your efforts regardless of audience size.

Another example: Tracking email engagement can be done via response rates, click rates, and many other metrics. All of these are informative proxy measures. But what if your email doesn't reach inboxes because it is being filtered as spam?

A handful of large internet companies govern what content reaches email inboxes. Sophisticated algorithms generate 'spam scores' are based on a number of variables, including open rates for the email that you send. Instead of measuring vanity metrics, keeping tabs on 'email list health' can help you keep clean lists and prevent email from being trapped in global spam filters (but still may not help with local filters). This could be expressed as a percentage of recipients who have interacted (opened or clicked) twice with your emails in the past six months.[1]

A handful of large internet companies govern what content reaches email inboxes

1   MobLab. "Clean your email lists and see metrics surge—Corporate Accountability International shares its shift to smart metrics." Blog. 17 June 2013.

Capture qualitative data with the same regularity as numbers

We didn't keep accurate count of the many times that our social channels helped us more effectively do our jobs by finding new contacts, discovering new tools, or enabling great user feedback. As a team, we should have tracked both quantitative and qualitative data on a running, narrative basis.

Concentrate more on visual content—and budget for it

Despite producing a large number of quality knowledge products, we did not have sufficient budget for professional graphic design for all of our products. Many content pieces (and our social channels) could have benefited from slicker web presentation and promotion. The trend across social networks is for more visual content—as bandwidth increases to handle the data demands. Going forward it would be wise to plan for regular graphic quotes and infographics.

Diversify our platforms to avoid an overdependence on Facebook

Initially, our team believed Facebook would be our primary traffic driver to ictforag.org. In August of 2012, after a very successful launch, Facebook dramatically restricted access to followers via free methods. That changed everything. The most effective way to succeed in social media is to have a robust multi-channel effort, and next time there will be several other ways to connect.

Establish a loosely coordinated monthly event and content theme

Largely due to the demand on both of our staff's time from conducting numerous technical assistance workshops in 2012–2013, our themed

The trend across social networks is for more visual content

The most effective way to succeed in social media is to have a robust multi-channel effort

content efforts were largely ad hoc. That could easily be remedied with a six-month theme calendar and some basic targets.

Examine African chat network opportunities closely

As examined in Component 1, much evidence suggests that our target audience is using social media primarily to chat via a variety of mobile apps, including Facebook Zero. This unique user behavior is an opportunity to develop strategies appropriate for this technology.

Be more vigilant in linking to social forums outside our own

There can never be enough online outreach. It is the cardinal rule of cultivating online community, so the real question is how to balance outreach with the rest of one's working life. The FACET team established a number of very positive relationships with key players in the agriculture

Evidence suggests that our target audience is using social media primarily to chat via a variety of mobile apps,

and ICT4D space, but with a more focused plan, we could have extended beyond these circles as well. Forums like LinkedIn, wikis, listservs, and other communities of practice are particularly valuable.

ILLUSTRATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA AND AGRICULTURE CASE STUDIES

While we've made the case for the value of social media, the development community has been overrun with hype about the power of these tools. Yes, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest have become synonymous with online components of campaign planning, and have worked their way into many 'innovative' development proposals. Many NGOs have used the exposure gained on social media to become 'development darlings' on the basis of pilot projects, raw metrics, and questionable lasting impact. The perspective of this handbook is that social media provide vital new tools that can present new opportunities to improve the way we work.

As we made the case in Component 1, as higher bandwidth and more affordable access to the internet diffuses around the world, we will continue to see more creative usage of social media. That is exciting, but at times, our enthusiasm obscures more than it illuminates. In his excellent book *The Art of Community*, Jono Bacon writes:

> Social media really is a *genuinely valuable tool*, but it is just
> *a tool*. While social media has certainly opened up new
> opportunities for community and user engagement, the
> tools are really not the interesting ingredient in the mixing

bowl; what is really interesting is how the tools shine a spotlight on the social values, needs, and opportunities that are implicit in humans.

A great social media approach will not fix flawed project design. Often, face-to-face interaction, resources and infrastructure, and meaningful staff expertise mean the difference between success and failure. That said there are numerous areas where social media have supported efforts in agriculture and lower bandwidth situations. For some it has been a central focus, while others it has been more of a complementary contribution. Below we profile some particularly interesting and relevant examples.

BROADCAST AND DISSEMINATION

Shamba Shape Up + *Africa Knowledge Zone*

Shamba Shape Up is a farm makeover reality show that was first developed in Kenya. During each episode the presenter and agricultural experts visit a family farm to demonstrate practical solutions to help them improve their production practices. Viewers are invited to send an SMS to a short code number with their name and address to request a free leaflet about the practices covered during the episode or to ask questions. The show began airing weekly on Citizen TV in Kenya in 2012 and Tanzania and Uganda in 2013, reaching seven million viewers in Season One, and claiming four million weekly viewers in Season Two.

As part of their outreach campaign, Shamba Shape Up maintains a nascent Twitter feed and a robust Facebook Page that has accumulated more than 8,000 Facebook Likes in their first year, with high levels of engagement. Posts often consist of daily video excerpts, images, or bonus

A great social media approach will not fix flawed project design

footage from the show; as well as extensive best practices connected to that week's episode.

AFRICA KNOWLEDGE ZONE is a clearinghouse website that collects educational material relevant to Africans. It is owned by the same parent as Shamba Shape Up, The Mediae Company. The site hosts all of Shamba Shape Up's free, on-demand video content, as well as maintaining a YouTube channel with roughly 400 subscribers. Initial studies conducted by the company suggest that 36 percent of farmers change their agricultural practices after being exposed to the series.

Posts often consist of daily video excerpts, images, or bonus footage from the show

INFORMATION SHARING AND CURATION

E-Agriculture

E-agriculture is a global online community (www.e-agriculture.org) run by the FAO with over 10,000 registered members focused on the use of ICTs for sustainable agriculture and development. Eighty percent of the members are in developing countries. The site includes hundreds of resources, news and events, blogs, and discussion posts on a variety of topics related to ICT and agriculture. They are also active on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, with over 14,000 followers, 2,500 Likes, and just under 2,000 members, respectively.

Almost all of their posts on Twitter and Facebook link back to their website, and are primarily used as an extension of the information sharing and discussions they do directly through their website. Although they use LinkedIn to share resources linked back to their website as well, it has also become a sharing and discussion page for members, which is curated by the e-agriculture administrators to remove spam and irrelevant content.

Social media bring in over 40 percent of their web traffic, with Twitter and Facebook being the most important sources. Though their Facebook Page strategy has required continuous reassessment and adjustments as Facebook changes its policies, it continues to prove worthwhile. Facebook brings a significant amount of traffic to the community's website, and is currently the organization's best social media outlet for reaching young people. In addition to raising awareness about content and activities on the community's website, Twitter is an important resource for information discovery.

Agrilinks

Agrilinks serves as the knowledge-sharing platform for USAID's Bureau for Food Security (USAID/BFS). Social media form just one part of their knowledge-sharing approach, which also includes a website (Agrilinks.org), live in-person and online events, and consultations. Their use of social media is driven by four primary objectives, which include:

- facilitating online communities/networks of people and organizations discussing agriculture and food security
- increasing the visibility of USAID/BFS online and establishing Agrilinks as a source for agriculture and food security knowledge sharing
- expanding existing USAID networks to reach a broad audience of agriculture and food security practitioners
- interacting with practitioners in the online spaces they have access to and are already using

To date Twitter has been their most successful platform with 3,100 followers.

Originally devised as a question and answer chat for their Twitter followers, Agrilinks' #AskAg chats have since evolved—thanks to user feedback—to a format where both experts and participants respond to a series of guiding questions, as well as participate in more informal sharing and chatting.

After conducting 10 chat events, growth in participation has been encouraging—from 32 participants and 300 tweets during the first chat, to 198 participants and over 900 tweets during their most recent chat. These social media efforts have turned into some of the largest referrals of traffic to the Agrilinks website, as well as helping to boost awareness of their events and resources.

CREATING ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN SUPPORT OF OFFLINE ACTIVITIES

AfricaAdapt

AfricaAdapt is an independent bilingual network (French/English) focused exclusively on Africa. Originally launched in 2008 with the lead of the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), AfricaAdapt is a 'named network' that was created to address a specific need: to facilitate knowledge-sharing among "researchers, policy makers, civil society organizations and communities who are vulnerable to climate variability and change across the continent." Today it is collaboratively hosted by three African organizations: Environment and Development in the Third World (ENDA-TM), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), and IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC).

AfricaAdapt has used social media and ICT-enabled knowledge sharing both to engage members continent-wide (more than 1,100 members to date, 80 percent of whom are Africans), but also to deal with the challenges of working with a large and geographically distributed partnership.

ICT and internet-based tools played a key role in mediating relationships within AfricaAdapt, which depended on decentralized but dedicated staff.

Skype voice calls, and especially facilitated text chat for limited bandwidth and ease of record keeping, were instrumental to partnership meetings. Internal wikis provided a collaboration platform, but faced resistance from partners who favored email and found the new tool an onerous additional level of navigation.

In terms of amplifying public awareness of the need for climate adaptation, AfricaAdapt produces and shares numerous videos via YouTube, while curating member video and text content on their 'Voices' page. The organization shares photos via Google+ and the @AfricaAdapt Twitter feed has collected nearly 2,800 followers to date.

A final distinguishing feature is AfricaAdapt's ongoing emphasis on face-to-face gatherings to balance online and offline interaction with and between the network's members in a wide variety of geographic locations. Though not initially planned, these in-person meetings became a successful effort to counter low engagement on their channels and boost online participation. For more information and a host of other insights, read IDS's working paper on Phase One of AfricaAdapt.

COLLABORATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND CROWDSOURCING INFORMATION

Indian turmeric farmers of Maharashtra

In January 2012, farmers in Asia's biggest turmeric producing market—the Sangli district of the Western India state of Maharashtra—had a big problem. The market for turmeric was flooded, and the resulting price crash threatened farmers' livelihoods.

A local farmer named Atul Salunkhe decided to reach out to other farmers via his Facebook account to prepare a plan of action and organize a response. In a few days, farmers decided to collectively halt sales of turmeric at the local auctions, cutting out the middlemen that were effectively driving down prices.

According to reports, on January 13, farmers in Atpadi village asked Salunkhe to send out a Facebook message that farmers should stay away from local auctions. In minutes, he conveyed this to 35 farmers from the Sangli District. Then the news went viral, reaching every village in Sangli district, which has more than 25,000 turmeric farmers. Salunkhe then took to IRC chats[2] to coordinate with other villages.
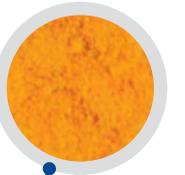
2. IRC is a live internet text messaging protocol created in 1988. While it has fallen out of favor in much of the wired world for lack of encryption and a host of other reasons, the technology still functions well on older computers and in low-bandwidth settings.

From the Economic Times of India:

On the morning of January 22, the Sangli auction yard stood empty. Thousands of farmers had stayed away. A protest that would have earlier taken months to organize now occurred within 10 days. When the farmers resumed selling their produce at the auction, the prices doubled from Rs 4 per kg to Rs 8 per kg. The boycott had served its purpose.

Further, social media is catching on with agricultural organizations in India. The turmeric farmers have proceeded to socially share best practices in crop patterns and to formalize their Facebook presence. Other Indian groups have taken notice of an increase in social media utilization, and integrated social channels in their websites. At press time, the Indian Farmers Association has soft launched their new website that will support social media for a variety of partners in its consortium.

Not in My Country

A novel approach to transparency-building, Not in My Country (NIMC) is an information crowdsourcing site founded in Uganda and operated by an anonymous "international group of concerned citizens who were tired of seeing 7 out of 10 countries in the world suffer under the severe burden of corruption." The encrypted site focuses on outing misbehavior, corruption, and simple incompetence in universities in Kenya and Uganda, allowing users to anonymously rate their professors and learning institutions. It also provides a means of reporting serious offenses, and potential legal support in appropriate cases, asking "Did your professor abuse you, ask you for alcohol, money, sex, or other things?"

Individuals and institutions are then given an overall average rating out of five in a variety of categories such as attendance, fairness, and accessibility.

Students and the public can then make choices based on the data, which are freely displayed to web visitors.

The website does not choose to publish corruption reports in real time, instead relying on both automated systems to filter "fraudulent reports" and then "endeavoring to verify the reports we receive before publicizing any details." In late 2013, the site plans to launch a mobile app with audio recording functionality that will allow users to record extortion attempts and securely transmit audio to the site.

The site also maintains a Twitter feed @NMCountry dedicated primarily to curating sources and content on anti-corruption and transparency around the world.

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

Philippines Department of Agriculture's e-Extension Program

In 2007, the Philippines Department of Agriculture created a multi-agency collaboration to provide "a more efficient alternative" to its existing extension system in agriculture, fisheries, and natural resources. Of early efforts in the agricultural space, it is one of the most ambitious and multifaceted— with complimentary radio, SMS, e-learning, and social media components. Led by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), the program is an elaborate online/offline effort also encompassing 14 online training centers throughout the country, live workshops, and other resources to provide direct PC access for communities to use their web-based e-learning modules.

The program's use of social media is largely narrow and promotional, focusing on information sharing, curation, and dissemination of program opportunities and activities. While its Twitter feed isn't regularly updated, and thus hasn't gained much traction, the e-Extension Program Facebook Page has more than 2,200 fans to date and maintains a higher level of engagement on the page than most similar efforts. This example highlights the value of multiple interactions with your target audience, and how reciprocal social media can be with the real world.

New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)

Mobile, social, and internet tools are evolving as important technologies for the future of agricultural extension, but in some places, organizations are using these tools today. As affordable mobile and tablet technology proliferates, this example will have increasing relevance around the globe, including in sub-Saharan Africa.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE: *As of December 2012, roughly half of New Wales' farmers had either a tablet computer or smartphone, and some areas had very poor connectivity outside their regional centers. This situation certainly resembles the mobile coverage patterns of many agricultural-oriented places in developing countries, but in other key respects, the operating environment is very different from many Feed the Future countries. Thus, this example this illustrative of what is possible with ample bandwidth and expertise. The authors recognize that even when the infrastructure, hardware, and systems are available for smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, replicating an effort like this one would also require a significant commitment to boosting the technical fluency of farmers living in many target communities.*
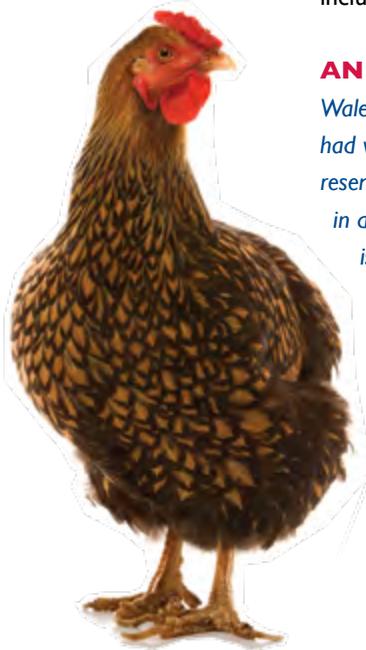
The eastern state of New South Wales (NSW) is a major hub of Australia's agricultural industry, providing large shares of the country's hay, fruit, legumes, fish, maize, nuts, wool, wheat, oats, oilseeds, poultry, rice, and vegetables. The government's agricultural extension efforts via social media and other ICTs are a particularly well-developed example of integrating social media and mobile apps for very targeted goals.

The New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) developed two mobile smartphone applications that use social media, GPS location data, and provide 'online decision support systems' to farmers.[3]

These apps include CropMate, a weather companion for farmers, and CropMate Variety Chooser, which contains the latest disease and yield trial data from nearly a dozen crops. Since its origination in 2010, NSW DPI has also created more than 100 two to six minute topical agronomic videos for their Youtube channels that guide farmers on local relevant topics, collect comments from viewers, and display them directly into relevant categorical and seasonal content sections within the mobile apps.

In addition, other web-connected tools allow users to balance and plan water irrigation, track expected flowering times for barley and wheat for a given location and sowing time, and other uses.[4] The app also features a note-sharing functionality that enables information to be shared with regional farmers about relevant details regarding their annual cultivation and harvest.

3. Karen Roberts and Graeme McIntosh. Use of mobile devices in extension and agricultural production- a case study. Australian Society for Agronomy Conference 2012.
4. http://www.irec.org.au/farmer_f/pff_187/Weather-and-climate-information.pdf

3

PLANNING TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUR PROJECT

GOALS

When you finish this component, you will have

- Explored a variety of approaches to work through your opportunities, constraints, and goals
- Planned the best use of social media in your project

For most people, their primary experience with social media is for personal purposes, such as sharing with friends via Facebook, building professional networks on LinkedIn, and keeping up with what's going on in the world through Twitter. This experience lends itself to a very ad hoc and self-centered engagement with these platforms. Whether you post 10 times a day or once a week, you are likely posting first and foremost based on what you find interesting—not necessarily what those in your networks are most interested in.

Save for the savviest of social media users, you also likely do not have a comprehensive agenda that you are trying achieve beyond simply sharing and consuming. Although to some extent, as individual users we are promoting our identity and way of life (i.e. 'personal brand'), this is on a much more basic level than is needed from an organizational or project perspective.

Although there is nothing wrong about engaging with social media in this way on your personal accounts, applying this same approach to your project social media efforts is the best way to set yourself up for failure. Although there is no one formula, the foundation of any potential success

> The foundation of any potential success comes from being able to meet your target audience's interests in a systematic and structured way

comes from being able to meet your target audience's interests in a systematic and structured way. Doing so requires developing a coherent strategy and plan for using social media. To state the obvious, "we need to have a Facebook page because everyone else has one," does not count as a coherent strategy.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

The internet rewards all sorts of behavior that we wouldn't consider acceptable in everyday life. Keep that in mind as you think through your objectives on social media. In today's media climate, anyone can be famous online (but not necessarily for the right reasons). Good social media engagement strategies can run the gamut from relevant to escapist, salacious to matter of fact, universal (think: Ethan Zuckerman's Cute Cat Theory) to extremely grounded and specific. The goal is to provide value in service to your larger goals, and not get hung up on the mechanics of clicks, retweets, and the other signifiers of internet fame.

Our point here is to put the work into planning before launching your efforts: Define your objectives, work within your constraints, and modify your plan as circumstances change. If you fail to do so, you may end up with newfound and unwelcome notoriety born of mistakes, controversy, or poor practice. A careful examination of your communications strategy is a good place to start.

> Put the work into planning before launching your efforts

COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING FIRST, THEN SOCIAL MEDIA

Before you even begin to develop your social media strategy, you should first develop your broader communications strategy. This is

Social media
should always
be integrated
into your
communications
approach

important because social media should always be integrated into your communications approach, rather than treated as a standalone entity. Social media represent just one approach of many that your team may need to consider for achieving your communications objectives. The reality is that they are just another communications stream—albeit with remarkable potential reach. And soon enough, it may be just as essential for agricultural development practitioners as radio, television, and print. Making sure that your social media approach is grounded in your overall approach will make it much easier to avoid becoming caught up in the buzz and excitement surrounding certain social media platforms, and instead focus only on those platforms that contribute to achieving your overall objectives. Without thinking strategically and laying the groundwork it is far more likely that your content and hard work will be met with the worst type of feedback: indifference. Although this handbook is not a guide to communications planning, it is useful to explore how social media planning fits into your overall communications strategy. Generally speaking, your communications strategy is going to include the following elements (along with others):

COMMUNICATIONS STREAMS

Social Media

Television

Radio

Print

- OBJECTIVES—including both primary and secondary objectives. These should be specific and address exactly what you are trying to achieve. For example: "To position our project as a source of up-to-date and state-of-the-art information and lessons learned on ICT and agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere."
- TARGET GROUPS—this should include both your primary and secondary audiences, segmented into distinct groups. For example, policymakers, agricultural extension agents, male farmers aged 18–34, female farmers aged 18–34, and so on.
  NOTE: *It is likely that only a portion of your audiences will be effectively served by social media tools.*

- CHANNELS—these are all of the communications channels that will be part of your communications strategy, of which social media may be one.

As you develop your communications strategy, you should decide what channels to use based on the best way to reach each of your target groups in a way that will enable you to maximize achieving your objectives. The Global Changemakers Social Media Toolkit developed by the British Council is a fantastic resource for guiding this process. They have developed a number of guiding questions that you can answer with your team based around the following four areas:

- thinking about the needs of your project
- thinking about the people you want to reach
- thinking about what you want to tell those people
- thinking about the tools that can you do it

Ultimately, the approaches that you choose to use will depend on a number of considerations, including the resources you have available (including financial, technical, and human), the access that your target groups have to each communications channel, and the capacity of each channel. Once you have begun to answer these questions, it may help to write out each of the potential communications channels along with which target groups they are most appropriate for reaching. Here's a basic example:

Communication Channel	Relevant Target Groups
Email newsletter	Policymakers, extension agents
Community forums	Community members, mostly men aged 40+
Flyers	Community members, literate
Billboards	Community members, literate
Mobile phone	Community members, with access to phone
Social media (broadly)	Policymakers, extension agents, young farmers

STRATEGY VS. CAMPAIGNS

This component focuses primarily on planning your overall social media strategy, which is not the same as individual campaigns that you may run to share information on a specific topic. Though many of the mechanics are the same, in terms of having goals and objectives, knowing your audience, and selecting which channels to use, campaigns are different in that in planning for them you will develop very specific strategic messages and tactics. Your overall social media strategy will not yet include either of these. It may be tempting to go directly into planning for one-off campaigns, it is important that you first develop your social media strategy to guide all of your social media activity, including any campaigns you will run. An excerpt from the FACET social media strategy has been provided at the end of this component as an example of what your final product might look like.

From this high-level overview of the options and relevant target groups, you can begin to home in on exactly which channels you will use and in what way, based on your resources, time, and scope of your strategy. Until now, we have spoken about social media within the context of your communications strategy as if it is a monolith, whereas in reality it is a conglomeration of an ever-shifting number of options. Once you've determined that social media in the broadest sense may be an appropriate channel for engaging with at least some of your target groups, you can begin the exercise of determining the precise platforms to use. To do this, you'll need to consider two main pieces of information: what platforms your target groups are currently using, and how they are using them. This will guide which platforms you consider using, and in what ways. In fact, one key to being successful in 'social' is to clearly understand what your audience wants from social media, and how you can address it. In many ways, people pursue the same varied interests that they gravitate towards in their offline lives.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA OPTIONS

To determine what platforms you may want to use, you need to understand which social media platforms are most popular in the country or region you are working in, and how they are most commonly used. Understanding what options exist will help you to narrow in on what platforms our target groups may be using. You may want to refer back to Component 1 to for a list of some of the most popular global platforms. Although it is meant to be a useful reference point, remember that it is not exhaustive, nor is it static. Platform popularity ebbs and flows, as does how they are used as a result of feature changes and changes in user behavior.

Keep in mind that there are thousands of social networks out there—each hoping to serve a specific purpose or audience. At least 12 networks have amassed 100 million users. And that doesn't take into account the social 'layer' integrated into many social media sites—of which Facebook is integrated into at least 1.1 million sites on the internet. Here is the point: The profusion of social networks and services represents a fundamental structural change in the way we communicate. There are a lot of options out there, so it is important to invest in the right ones.

In the face of a constantly evolving landscape, it may be tempting to create your own social media space from scratch. Although this is always an option, there is little need to make your social media presence the same space as where you manage content (e.g., a website). We strongly

encourage you to consider platforms where your audience is already congregating for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the investment and ongoing development necessary to create your own space is significant, as is the level of effort it will take to effectively market this new space to potential users. Second, most people tend to shy away from anything that requires them to remember additional login information. Third, you are likely to be much more successful if you meet your audience where they already are, rather than expecting them to come to you. And last, you need to think about the sustainability of any platform after the life of your project.

That said, if you are interested in exploring building your own social media space independent of existing platforms you will want to do a significant amount of research to ensure that what you require must be built, and is worth the cost of doing so. You will also want to hold focus groups and conduct surveys with your target audience to make sure that any platform is going to meet their needs and that nothing else like it already exists, and do usability testing during the design and development phase to make sure it functions in a way that will encourage user engagement and participation.[1] Also, make sure that you speak with other organizations that have gone this route—such as Digital Green's Farmerbook and Farm Radio International and CTA's Barza (in beta)—to learn from their experience.

1. For a helpful guide on how to conduct focus groups, refer to pages 157–159 in Component 5 of *Integrating Low-cost Video into Agricultural Development Projects: A Toolkit for Practitioners.*

MORE THAN JUST
Social Media

Keep in mind that your engagement with your target audience may also require the use of additional online tools or information and communications technologies beyond what is commonly defined as social media.

As mentioned in Component 1, a lack of affordable connectivity, a lack of local literacy, unreliable electricity, or other barriers may be significant disincentives to use social media to reach your target audience. In such cases, other tools may meet your needs more effectively.

One example: A majority of your target audience may already have access to mobile phones, which means that SMS, voice messages, and USSD (a system that directly connects a phone to the mobile network and with the capacity to use text menus even on feature phones) may be better options. The latter is already being used to enable feature phone owners in a number of African countries to access Facebook through their mobile phones without requiring a data plan—although using USSD menus can be complicated by the fact that you need to first establish a partnership with a local mobile network operator.[1]

Each of these has their pluses and minuses as compared to social media through the internet. If you are looking to provide an agricultural information service, it may be that setting up an interactive voice response system that users can query for information makes more sense than sharing those resources via social media, since the former is much more of an on-demand service than the latter. Mobile services, however, are primarily one-to-one relationships and will not enable the rich, many-to-many types of sharing and discussion that social media platforms excel at facilitating—although this is changing through social mobile platforms such as Awaaz.De and 8villages.

* Vota, W. *Get Facebook on ANY Mobile Phone via USSD* (ICT Works, April 4, 2012) http://www.ictworks.org/2012/04/04/get-facebook-any-mobile-phone-ussd/

Map out your
target groups, the
desired outcome
you want social
media to facilitate,
and the best
platforms to use
for those purposes

CHOOSING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM(S)

After you've considered all of your options, you can begin the process of deciding which, if any, social media platforms you plan to use and how you will use them. One way to do this is to map out your target groups, the desired outcome you want social media to facilitate, and the best platforms to use for those purposes. While it may be tempting to be on many platforms, try to focus only on those platforms where you have a reasonable likelihood of being able to achieve your objectives with your target audience, otherwise it will quickly overwhelm your staff capacity and dilute your brand. At the same time, avoid looking at only the usual suspects— there is much more diversity to the social media landscape than just Facebook and Twitter.

Specific user demographic data for most of Africa is not as readily accessible and available as it is for social media users in the U.S., although there are some sites, such as Socialbakers, that provide some basic demographic information for Facebook users in Africa. Most likely though, you will have to make some educated guesses based on

DON'T BE AFRAID TO REASSESS

During this process, you may decide that social media are not appropriate channels for reaching your target audience in a high-impact and cost-effective manner. Even if that is the case, you should not completely discard the idea of using social media at some point in the future. Document your issues point by point, and if possible, consider what would need to change for social media to make sense.

Unlike other more traditional channels, which are relatively stable in terms of their potential capacity and reach, social media are rapidly changing. Platforms that are popular today could be overtaken by platforms that do not even yet exist. Increasing access to internet both through fixed and mobile broadband, coupled with a growth in low bandwidth social media options means that social media could become viable for your team sooner than you may imagine. It is recommended, therefore, to periodically reassess how your project engages with social media and adapt as appropriate.

your experience and conversations with individuals in your target groups. Some of the questions that you might want to ask them to help guide your decisions are

- What social media platforms do you use?
- How frequently do you use those platforms?
- How do you most commonly use those platforms (such as sharing, chat)?
- If you wanted to learn about [insert topic] on this platform, what would you hope to find?
- How are you accessing those platforms (computer, smart phone, feature phone, tablet)?
- What do you share through those platforms?
- What, if any, platforms do you use to learn about [insert topic here]?

Once you have gathered all of this information, you can begin to think about what platforms are most appropriate for reaching your target groups in the desired manner. An example of a social media platform map might look something like this:

Target group	Desired outcome	Appropriate platform(s)	Rationale
Policymakers	Increased access to high-level research	Email listserv	Targeted policymakers do not tend to use any social media platforms for work-related functions. Given the periodic and sporadic nature of interaction, email updates are likely best suited.
Agricultural institutions, organizations, universities	Exchange and share resources	Twitter	Most of the institutions that we are interested in sharing with are already active on Twitter.
Extension agents	Increased opportunities for collaboration Increased access to resources	Facebook Email listserv	Since we already hold monthly meetings with agents and they are already mostly on Facebook, creating a group to encourage sharing and collaboration could be helpful. We could also share resources through this group and via email.

You can use the following blank form with your team to write out what options are best suited for your needs.

Target group	Desired outcome	Appropriate platform(s)	Rationale

Once you have completed this task, check with a representative sample of each of your target groups to confirm whether your assumptions are correct. If they are not, make adjustments based on their feedback. These decisions will form the basis of your social media plan. The next step is to set up your goals for each platform, determine what tasks are necessary to achieve those goals, what team members will be responsible, and what level of effort they will require. Be self-critical and realistic when goal setting as it often significant period of time before you build a following (a year is not an unreasonable expectation). Also remember that these goals should generally be related to or feed up into your overall communications goals. An example of what that might look like follows.

You need to invest in cultivating the social aspects of each platform

Platform	Twitter
Goal	From 800–1,000 followers by end of first year, and an average retweet rate of 3 per tweet.

Necessary Tasks	Person Responsible	Level of Effort
Identify relevant online content to share	Mel	4 hours per week
Conduct outreach to staff and partners via email (and coordinate messaging)	Mel	5 hours per week
Package existing relevant offline content for social media	Mel	2.5 hours per week
Develop new 'short-form' content to feed into social media	Mel	6 hours per week
Work toward creating 'longer form' cornerstone content for next month	Collins	1.5 hours per week
Engage with follower communities online	Mel	2 hours per week
Track feedback and analytics for reports	Mel	3 hours per week

A Note on Advertising

Many people think of social media as free, with the exception of some staff time. The reality is that as social media platforms become more congested, it is becoming increasingly necessary to think about paying to promote your channels or specific posts. On Facebook, for example, you can very specifically target users based on their location, gender, age, and 'Likes.' You may want to think about setting aside some funds for these purposes. For the time being, these costs are still fairly low to target people in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as much of many other places outside North America and Europe.

If you instead look at social media as a one-way push of information, you will very quickly discover that you end up pushing it all into a vacuum

Complete this form for each platform that you plan to use. Once you've finished, take a close look at the level of effort required. Does everyone who has been assigned tasks have the required time available to successfully complete these tasks? If not, you will need to make changes. This could be from scaling back your goals and thus the level of effort required, or through bringing in additional staff. Although our tendency may be to think of social media as fun and low-input activity, the reality is that using any of these channels requires significant amounts of time. Not only do you need to prepare and adapt content for these channels, but you also need to invest in cultivating the social aspects of each platform. Simply opening an account or building a page does not mean that social interaction will spontaneously follow. At least one member of your team should have a sufficient amount of time dedicated to these tasks. If you instead look at social media as a one-way push of information, you will very quickly discover that you end up pushing it all into a vacuum that consists of only a handful of colleagues and not much else.

Use the blank form on the following page to do this for each platform that you consider using. You can type directly into the form, or print it out and write on the form.

Platform	
Goal	

Necessary Tasks	Person Responsible	Level of Effort

CREATING AN ONLINE IDENTITY

After you have completed this exercise and fine-tuned your plans for each platform, the next step is to come up with a strong and consistent branding identity that you can use across platforms. If your project has access to a broader communications or branding team, it is important to work in collaboration with them. Whatever identity you choose should be instantly understandable and relevant to whatever you are trying to communicate. Your identity is what will set you apart from everyone else on social media who is screaming for attention. A good identity can also outlast a typical project lifespan. So choose wisely.

Although there is no golden rule to developing an online identity, there are some general rules that you can follow. For one, using a project name for your online brand is generally a bad idea. Take this project, for example. Branding our social media channels as FACET would have meant very little to anyone who did not already know about our project. There is nothing about the word FACET that instantly associates it with what we do, which is share resources related to ICT and agriculture. Instead, we settled on the online brand ICTforAg, which immediately says what it is about. Without knowing anything else about this brand, someone who is interested in learning more about ICT and agriculture would reasonably be able to assume that our channels might have something for them. Everything from our project website (www.ictforag.org) to Facebook (/ICTforAg) to Twitter (@ICTforAg) all the way down to our e-newsletters and webinars used this branding. This enabled us to more effectively build off of each channel. For example, people who followed @ICTforAg on Twitter were more likely to attend a webinar if they knew it was being led by the same trusted source, than if it was unbranded.

It is important to consider a number of different identities before settling on the one you will use. Come up with a shortlist of 3–4 identities that

you think are recognizable and identifiable, and then test them with a small group of people from the target groups you plan to reach through social media. Ask them about what they associate each name with, which they prefer, and any that they dislike. Although this may seem like extra work, it is well worth the alternative. Changing your online identity after it has already been launched can lead to audience drop off, as not everyone will migrate to your new identities. In fact, it is important to keep in mind that the familiarity of your online identity is an organizational asset. If this is done early on, you may be able to mitigate the effects of this change with clever content marketing, but the best approach remains to choose wisely and stick with your identity prior to launch.

DEVELOPING YOUR ACTIVITY CHECKLISTS

It is also useful at this stage to develop a checklist of everything that needs to be done across all of the channels in your communications plan—both social and traditional—so that your communications efforts are coordinated and build upon each other. For example, let's say that your organization or project is responsible for developing brief practitioner-oriented papers. Your checklist might look something like this:

FACET's Original Shortlist

The original list included ICTforAg, ICT4Ag, and ICTandAg. After some testing, we decided upon ICTforAg.

Actions	Person Responsible	Timeline	Completed? Y/N
Write a short, one-paragraph abstract summarizing the information	Mel	3 days prior to publication	
Include in email newsletter with a link to full paper	Collins	Received in inbox of newsletter recipients by 9am	
Develop at least 3 different 140-character statement for use on Twitter	Mel	Tweet at 9 a.m., 1 p.m., and 4 p.m. on day of publication	
Write 2–3 sentence summary of pertinent information for uploading to Facebook pages	Mel	Posted on Facebook by 9 a.m. day after publication	
Encourage partners to retweet	Mel	Within first 48 hours of publication	
Contact thought leaders and other 'content volunteers' and provide them with the various summaries (e.g., Tweet language, abstract paragraph) and encourage them to promote the content	Mel	Within first 72 hours of publication	
Write a question or request for feedback based on the content and re-post on Facebook, Twitter, and in relevant LinkedIn groups	Mel	Within one week of publication	
Promote learning event via Twitter and Facebook	Mel	Post once on Facebook and daily on Twitter for one week prior to event	
Host learning event to formally launch paper	Collins	Within two weeks of publication	
Mail hard copies of paper to relevant organizations	Collins	Within two weeks of publication	

Depending on the size of your team, it also helps to ensure that all members are on the same page

As you can see, this checklist employs both social media and traditional methods of communication to promote sharing of these papers. By coordinating how each of these methods will be used in one document, your project can ensure that they are being used in a complementary manner. Depending on the size of your team, it also helps to ensure that all members are on the same page. In the example above, even though Mel is responsible for all social media activities and Collins is responsible for other communications activities, they both know what they need to do, when to do it, and how it relates to what the other is doing.

Use the following form to map out your own indicators.

Actions	Person Responsible	Timeline	Completed? Y/N

> **"**Culture eats strategy for breakfast."
>
> *~ Peter Drucker*

CREATING A CULTURE CONDUCIVE TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Beyond those staff that may be responsible for implementing your social media activities, everyone on your team should be encouraged to participate either through their personal accounts or shared responsibility for your organizational or project accounts. Although many organizations are skittish about opening up social media to all employees, the potential benefits from increased social engagement far outweigh the risks. Ensuring this happens depends upon how staff members are encouraged or discouraged to use social media.

Making sure that your team is using social media in a way that contributes toward achieving your communications objectives is crucial. Although the tendency of many managers who are new to social media may be to control employee behavior with a list of what they should not do and how they should behave, this type of restrictive approach tends to stifle the spontaneity and informally that social media crave.

Instead, consider setting up suggested best practices or guidelines that employees can refer to when using social media. For example, instead of saying, "Never speak about anything outside of your technical area of expertise without first
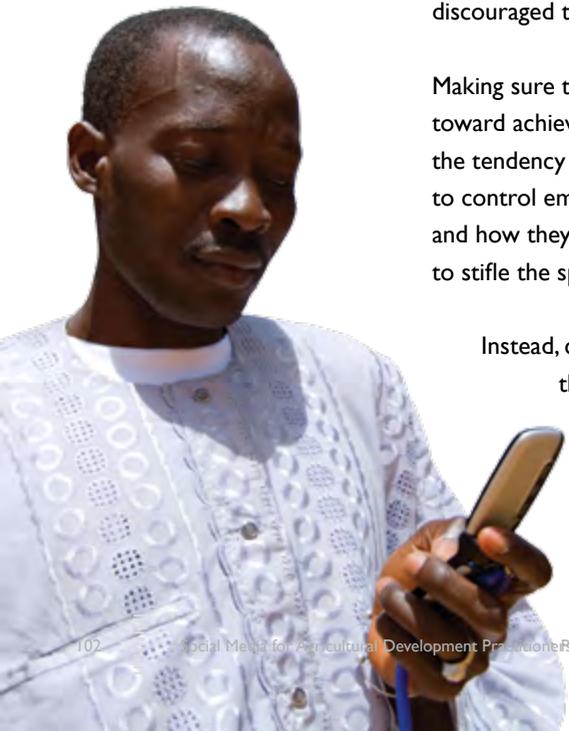
Winning Buy-In from the Boss

While this section is written from a managerial perspective, it is often younger members of staff that need to educate their bosses on the utility and importance of social media. Below are a few tips to keep in mind:

* **DO YOUR HOMEWORK.** We hope this handbook provides some helpful rationale for pursuing social media in many projects. Read the footnoted materials and you will have a quality basis for discussion (and rebuttal).

* **IDENTIFY THOSE VOICES THAT ARE TRUSTED BY DECISION MAKERS.** It can be too many steps up the ladder for younger staff to discuss social media with senior management. Figure out who has your executive's ear, and build your case with them.

* **HIGHLIGHT THE GOOD WORK OF PARTNERS AND PEER ORGANIZATIONS.** A little rivalry can go a long way towards launching new efforts, or investing further in those social media channels your project uses already.

* **'PILOT' IN PRIVATE.** If you can develop a strategy, test it out, and experience some early success, that can highlight the value of social media.

* **BECOME A GUIDE.** The agricultural and international development communities do not move as quickly as the private sector or individuals. While advocating has its place, at times being patient and providing education will yield best results.

CRISIS PLANNING

In previous eras of project communications, best practices in public relations were a comparatively simple proposition. Most potential risks could be mitigated with good media relations, a quality press release, and fact-checking. Because top-down control of one's message is antithetical to social media, it is important to be thoughtful about your engagement online. Though complete control is no longer possible, several important actions will mitigate the risk of viral controversy:

1. Ensure your content is truthful, transparent, and respectful.

2. Encourage transparency and provide next steps in your community engagement

guidelines for a broad spectrum of audience responses.

3. A monitoring dashboard should be created to ensure inaccurate information is caught early and malicious conversation is brought offline. This can be as simple using a third-party dashboard like HootSuite in conjunction with Google Analytics, or with more sophisticated paid services.

4. A crisis management plan should be created to manage and deploy reserve content in the event of a malicious hacking event or negative media event.

Further Resources:
Social Media Influence's Crisis Response Plan Example
Salesforce's *All-Star Social Media Crisis Response for Brands*

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receiving approval from the technical director," you can say something like, "When writing about something outside of your technical area of expertise, consider getting feedback from a subject matter expert first. This can save you from the embarrassment of saying anything inaccurate, irrelevant, or just plain uninteresting.

Why is this important? Put simply, it is because the way you support or restrict social media usage on your team will be reflected in the tone of your social media channels, which will have an impact on how others

outside of your organization or project engage with you. Restrictive policies tend to foster a culture of hesitancy and aversion, which can often result in boring content and untimely engagement. Facilitative policies, on the other hand, tend to encourage employees to experiment and feel more comfortable about contributing. If you cannot trust your employees to use social media in line with your objective, then you likely have a people problem, not a social media one—and no amount of restrictive policies is going to correct that.

If you're not quite sure where to begin, the Policy Tool for Social Media, which was developed by the Canadian firm rtraction, automatically generates a policy for you in minutes after answering twelve short questions. Also, check out how other companies and organizations are governing social media. The website Social Media Governance includes links to hundreds of different policies and guidelines that you can reference. A good example of what positive policy expectations can look like is the social media section of National Public Radio's (NPR) Ethics Handbook.

Whatever guidance you come up with for your team should be based on your organization's broader expectations from staff, how you plan to use social media, and what type of audience engagement you would like to see. Don't let the sense of needing to have some sort of written policy or guidance dictate your actions. In the case of our project, since we were relatively small we decided to forgo any written guidance. We found that a clear understanding of what we were trying to achieve through using social media as agreed to in our communications plan and open communication among team members was sufficient. In the end, it's not as complicated as it may seem. The characteristics of a good social media policy are perhaps best summed up by what Zappos' (a U.S. online retailer) founder

A good example of what positive policy expectations can look like is the social media section of National Public Radio's (NPR) Ethics Handbook.

Tony Hsieh has referred to as the key attributes to employee happiness (adapted here for social media):

- PERCEIVED CONTROL—Staff feel that they are in control of how they engage with social media within your project.
- PERCEIVED PROGRESS—Staff see progress of social media channels (such as increases in followers and engagement).
- CONNECTEDNESS—Staff feel connected to a greater community facilitated through social media.
- VISION/MEANING—Staff feel that they are part of something bigger than their individual tasks (they see how each social media engagement they have connects back to the larger project objectives).

LAUNCHING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES

Once your social media plan is in place, the last step before launching your channels generally involves receiving approval. Depending on your organization's internal policies, they may require explicit approval before any projects are officially allowed to use social media. You will want to check with your internal communications department around the time you begin your planning to make sure that your plans are consistent with your organization's policies. Even if your organization does not have any social media policies, your communications department may have best practices that they can share with you based on the experience of other projects.

In addition to internal approvals, you will also likely need approval from USAID (or any other critical partners or funders of your work). At present, USAID does not have a specified social media policy; therefore you should seek approval for your use of social media in accordance

with the terms of your agreement or contract. USAID's Office of Digital Communications, however, can provide guidance to projects to ensure that their planned use of social media is in alignment with OMB guidance.

After your plans have been approved, you are finally ready to launch your social media channels. This can often be an unceremonious occasion, since you need to build awareness for each channel before people begin to engage with them. To prepare for the launch, come up with a list of all of the individuals and organizations that you plan to notify. It is advisable to first do a soft launch through which you build followers based on those individuals and organizations that you are already working with directly. Come up with a brief description of what you are trying to achieve through each channel, who your target audience is, and why you are inviting them to participate. You'll also want everyone on your team to update their email signatures to link to your social media channels.

French language *flyer promoting ICTforAg social media channels for TechCamp in Senegal in August 2012.*

Though much of this initial promotion will be done virtually, do not overlook the value of in-person promotion as well. Mention your channels at any meetings and events you participate in, add links at the ends of your presentations, and consider passing out promotional flyers. These need not be expensive. In our case, we printed four flyers to a page and hand cut them ourselves, so we did not need to use a more expensive printing house. If the size of your project and scope of your social media ambitions are significantly large—on the order of hundreds of thousands of people or more—you may even consider holding a launch event to quickly

Do not overlook the value of in-person promotion

increase awareness of your channels and their purpose.

A strong launch that generates initial interest is important to helping you build the momentum and engagement you will need to grow your channels and achieve your objectives. Unfortunately, there are many examples of social media channels with exciting launches that sputtered out. Although there are a number of reasons why social media channels fail, one of the most significant contributing factors is poor quality or poorly marketed content. The next component, therefore, focuses on helping your team with how to develop and market content for social media.

> A strong launch that generates initial interest is important to growing your channels and achieving your objectives

Illustrative example:
Excerpt from FACET Social Media Strategy

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Primary objective:
To effectively position FACET and its public face, ICTforAg, as a source of up-to-date and state-of-the-art information and lessons learned on agricultural ICT in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.

Other goals in this strategy:
1. Increase interest and availability of FACET's written and multimedia resources
2. Boost attendance at FACET webinars and in-person events
3. Generate interest in the project with the possibility of further short-term technical assistance (SSTA).
4. Help build credibility in the broader practitioner community through online engagement of our target audiences.

Audiences:
The main audiences for these communications strategies are:

1. USAID mission staff in sub-Saharan Africa and Washington, DC
2. USAID implementing partner organizations and managers in sub-Saharan Africa
3. Any other organizations and individuals that are vested in ICT in agriculture

Strategic Approach
Because of the short timetable in which to accomplish our objectives, mostly online media channels will be used to communicate information and promote materials created under the project. This will require providing information in a variety of formats, and distilling complex language for a variety of audiences. For example, whenever a new briefing paper is developed under FACET, salient information and highlights will be distilled from the publication and promoted through a variety of

channels, including postings on Twitter and Facebook, through blogs, on the website, and through email lists. *A checklist that includes considerations and available tools for new project resources, called "The Toolbox," is at the end of this document.*

The FACET project has valuable content assets. For two years, the team has been collecting information and organizing it on USAID's Allnet site, but that site has maintained a low profile for various reasons. FACET's new communications strategies are focused on building a larger community through which to distribute the project's papers and other information materials. Combined with our recent success in opening the FACET Allnet page to non-registered users, we expect those strategies to help us reach a significantly larger audience with FACET's knowledge products.

FACET Social Media Strategy
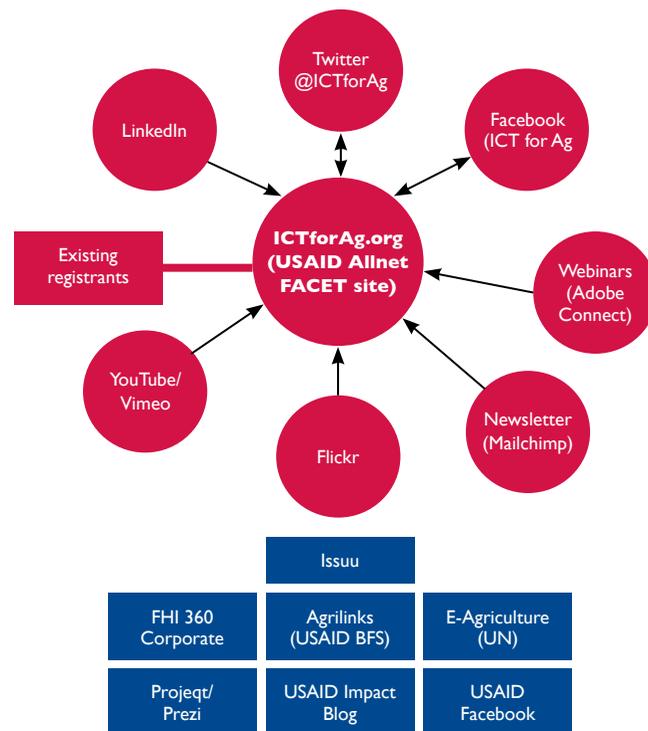
1. ICTforAg.org [USAID Allnet website]
2. Newsletter
3. Webinars
4. Email Marketing
5. Partner Website Outreach
6. Twitter
7. Facebook
8. LinkedIn
9. Flickr

1. ICTforAg.org [USAID Allnet website]

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY: Our web home, ICT to Enhance Impact of Agriculture Development, is hosted by USAID Allnet, and serves primarily as an organized repository for our project documents and links (called resources) to relevant materials. A retrofit of the look and feel of the site is appropriate at this time, as is the opening of access to more website materials. Currently, the site doesn't call attention to FACET materials very efficiently; requiring multiple clicks and foreknowledge of the desired information. FACET materials will be hosted beyond the life of the project—which is the key value added by the Allnet site—and makes it indispensable to our stakeholders. Allnet offers other functions, such as a blog and chat forums, but the site currently does not have a critical mass of registered users (only 208 to date) to encourage wide readership and use of those functions.

Recommendation:

- Make project resources available to the public
- Consider opening up as much of the website to the public without requiring registration
- Create new design elements as indicated below

GOAL: Make alterations in two phases, without disrupting function of the website.

By November 1st, have an average of 1,200 unique visitors per month (from May 2012 rate of 600 visitors per month).

2. Newsletter

STATE OF PLAY: After the project website, our most valuable outreach tool is the project newsletter, which we recently named *FACET's Digital Vine*. As other channels grow, the newsletter audience will grow correspondingly.

GOAL: By end of project, it is likely that we can **double the number of recipients on the list (currently 350) to 700**, and perhaps do even better, depending on the frequency of our offline events. This will result in a valuable and up-to-date list of interested parties available to any potential follow-on project.

3. Webinars

GOAL: Conduct at least four webinars by end of project on strategic topics—from the following topics and depending on deliverable availability. Ideally, two would be Agrilinks (BFS) co-branded and marketed.

- Agricultural MIS
- Interactive radio for Ag
- Input supply
- Mobile applications for M&E
- Outgrower management
- Mobile finance

4. Email Marketing

FACET team members should add clickable links in message footers for email, and every active FACET social network.

5. Partner Website Outreach

Although plans will inevitably evolve as opportunities for collaboration open up, currently we have the following relationships that can be helpful in promoting our content and expertise:

- Cross-posting: E-Agriculture
- Cross-posting: Microlinks
- Content partnership: Agrilinks (BFS). A new biweekly column adapting our ICT profiles for their web audience.
- Webinar promotion: Co-branded with Agrilinks (BFS)
- USAID Africa Bureau intranet
- World Bank ICTinAgriculture
- FHI 360 Corporate: For larger events and deliverables, such as the interactive radio toolkit

- FHI 360 Degrees Blog: For occasional items of interest to the corporate site, written in a personal voice.
- USAID Social Media Properties
- USAID Impact Blog (for field activities and beneficiary-oriented stories)

Social Networking

6. Twitter—Primary responsibility: Communications Specialist

The approach to Twitter will focus on organic growth, with the handle @ICTforAg. In addition, the voice of the medium is more personal, the audience is highly knowledgeable on our topics and influential in the real world. A large percentage of our initial followers are agriculture and technology practitioners. In addition, Twitter is a 'link economy'. Thus, linking to resources will be the rule, rather than the exception. Here we will focus on building a reputation based on expertise, informality, and frequent user engagement.

GOALS: 30 days from launch (7/8/12): 65 followers. By 9/1/12: 200 followers. By 12/31/12: 400 followers.

7. Facebook—Primary Responsibility: Communications Specialist

The ICTforAg Facebook Page went live on June 28, 2012. Our goal on Facebook is to create an audience funnel back to the FACET website, and to create an additional prominent platform for our resources. This platform will drive significant attendance to our webinars. We will be posting and populating multimedia content, but given the multitude of other platforms, comprehensiveness is not a good use of LOE.

SCHEDULE: Recent research data from Beekeeper Group, a social media analyst firm, indicates that 4 posts per week encourages strong engagement from the

development community, and is the lowest consistent participation on this channel that will encourage at least industry average virality (6.8 actions per post per 1,000 followers). That should be our baseline.

A content calendar will be developed to maintain the Facebook posting schedule—often with a weekly theme to promote FACET activities (GIS systems, mobile applications) in anticipation of a new resource or event. In addition, Facebook is often referred to as a 'photo economy', and we know from experience that photos are often the most effective posts on the site. To that end, it is necessary to think visually and find ways to demonstrate our themes graphically.

GOALS: Between 800 and 1,000 followers by project end, depending on target demographics. FACET will post an average of four times a week and should generate 7 actions per 1,000 followers.

8. LinkedIn—Staff should post individually to specific forums

Our project will be active in LinkedIn, but that effort will not be focused on our own dedicated project space. Instead, participation in existing forums will be a complementary effort to our other social media efforts—with the goal of 3 posts per week in appropriate group spaces for our subject matter. The goal should be to drive people to FACET resources and to sign up for the project's mailing lists and social media channels.

GOAL: An average of 3 posts per week linking back to the ICTforAg website (with social media references in post footers)

9. Flickr

This will be the hub for our images because the Flickr viewer easily embeds on USAID-branded sites and social media sites.

"The Toolbox" for Dissemination of FACET Content

When we produce a new resource, the idea would be to systemize a web-based dissemination strategy. For each document, news item or other FACET-related development that should be promoted, we will take the following steps and dissemination channels:

- ✓ Write a short, one-paragraph abstract summarizing the information
- ✓ Include in email newsletter with a link to full document/article
- ✓ Send to FHI 360 Communication staff for consideration on the website or blog
- ✓ Write a 140-character statement for use on Twitter
- ✓ Send out through ICTforAg Twitter account

For higher profile documents (e.g., briefing papers), the following steps are likely appropriate:

- ✓ Send to FHI 360 Communication social media staff for dissemination via the FHI 360 Twitter account
- ✓ Encourage content volunteers to retweet
- ✓ Write 2–3 sentence summary of pertinent information for uploading to Facebook pages
- ✓ Upload to FACET Facebook page and other, related Facebook pages
- ✓ **Issuu/Scribd:** Post if e-readership is an important aim
- ✓ **Prezi/Projeqt Goal:** Create 3 Prezis by end of project on subjects that are relevant to our audiences
- ✓ **Tableau Goal:** Generate one new infographic monthly, or as needed, for social media dissemination or presentations

- ✓ Write a question or request for feedback based on the content and re-post on Facebook, Twitter, and in relevant LinkedIn groups
- ✓ Identify any photographs, videos or other graphic elements that can be included as part of the web stories or on the Facebook postings
- ✓ Contact thought leaders and other 'content volunteers' and provide them with the various summaries (e.g., Tweet language, abstract paragraph), and encourage them to promote the content

4

HOW TO DEVELOP CONTENT

GOALS

When you finish this component, you will have

- Explored fundamental questions about your aims and capacity for connecting online
- Learned a variety of ways to create compelling content to engage your audience

For better or worse, the fact that we are all publishers now makes enormous amounts of information available to us via social media. In efforts to describe this phenomenon, we often resort to metaphors. Some describe the online ecosystem as a 'river' of data, but in reality, it is more like a flood—of biblical proportions.

Regardless, the demand for this information—our stories, photos, geo-located experiences—only seems to be growing. As the space in our social 'newsfeeds' becomes more crowded, more careful thought and creativity will be required to reach your objectives. Not unlike the popularization of email in the mid-1990s, much of the information we see in social media is self-obsessed, low-quality, or the product of a cultural echo chamber. The challenge as both content creator and consumer is to navigate the bad stuff to discover what's important to us. It's no small task.

In his book on neuroscience and the internet, Nicholas Carr writes, "The distractions in our lives have been proliferating for a long time, but never has there been a medium that, like the Net, has been programmed to so widely scatter our attention and do it so insistently."

As a messenger, that distraction represents your most formidable adversary. If you goal is to create awareness, to increase access to project information, to find collaborators, or execute other objectives online, you must give your audience a reason to care. How do you do that? By creating content that gives them what they want, in ways that also achieve your objectives.

Creating great social media streams won't have a one-size-fits-all solution. Success has many different possible measures; the question is how to do it well, particularly in an era of limited budgets, staff time, bandwidth, and a host of other constraints. This is the topic that will be covered in this component.

We will delve into the art and science known as content marketing, to make the most of the effort that your project can invest. Since most of us in international and agricultural development have other responsibilities in our work, it isn't feasible to commit our complete attentions to launching nascent social media efforts (nor is it smart to simply assign it to the intern). The good news: The strategies, tactics, and approaches that follow will help you create the kind of content that you find your audience wants, taking your available resources into account.

CULTIVATE YOUR OWN VOICE

One of the simplest tricks is to read your social media writing aloud before posting it. After all, the post is often to invoke conversation. Every post should be composed with engagement in mind—using active verbs and presenting a clear sequence of thoughts in an informal voice. Also, if you have multiple people working on posts, agree on some simple traits of your project's online personality.

> Creating great social media streams won't have a one-size-fits-all solution

> Read your social media writing aloud before posting it

NOTHING REPLACES AUTHENTICITY

Good content marketing tactics will make a big difference. But it helps immeasurably if your team loves your content, invests time and energy in it, shapes it specifically to your targets and platforms, and acts responsively on the feedback you receive. Authenticity is an overused word in this day and age, and it is difficult to define. But we often 'know it when we see it' and miss it when it isn't present. A couple of tips: Make your content sound as if real person wrote it, rather a robot. Common mistakes include cutting and pasting from technical literature, or excessive automation of the process, thus neglecting the 'social' and responsive aspects of social media. Do not just accept the automatic wording of sites when you share content from their embedding social media plugins. In general, you will achieve better engagement, and build better skill, by putting things in your own words.

BE CHANNEL SPECIFIC

For the sake of expediency, it can be tempting to reuse preexisting digital content across multiple channels without modification. But each social service has its own specific quirks, and rewards specific formats and styles. If your content isn't packaged for the right platform, tagged properly to make it easy to find, or doesn't add value, how will your audience respond? Put another way: If you don't care about making accessible content, what makes you think your audience will enjoy it?

Nearly a decade's worth of social media testing and algorithm optimization tells us the answer: Most of
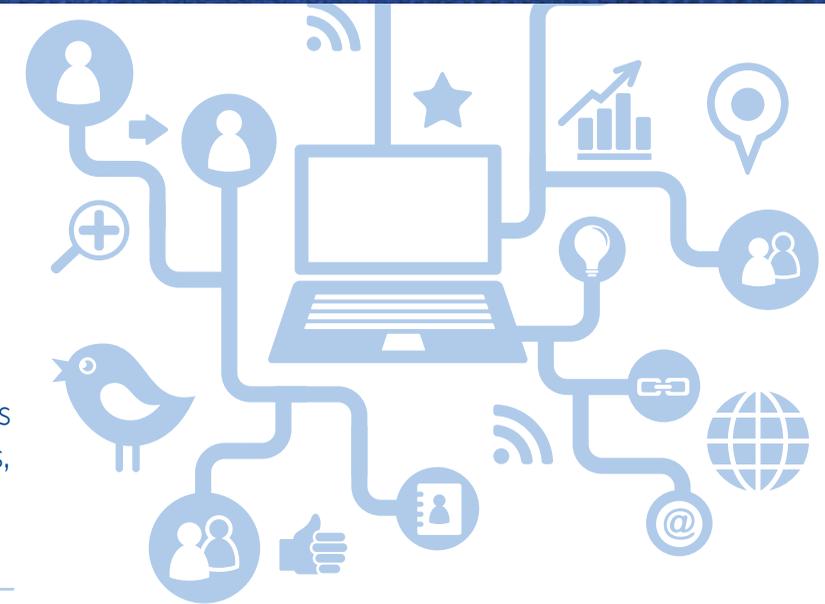
Each social service has its own specific quirks, and rewards specific formats and styles

your audience won't. Either the content will be filtered out of newsfeeds, or most of your audience simply won't engage further.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE USER'S NEEDS

It can be easy to promote your agenda while losing track of the audience's preferences. Before posting, always ask yourself, "What's in this for them?" The answer can occasionally favor your project's needs, but mostly should tilt toward your users.

KEEP IT INFORMAL

Although official reports tend to be formal and full of industry jargon, the social media context prizes a more casual voice. Consider linking to official resources while providing expert, provocative, and plain language comment. Leave the marketing-speak for other more appropriate venues.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Before going into the details of content marketing, it is worthwhile to define a few key terms first. Having a shared understanding of what each of these terms is referring to will help with how you develop your content strategy.

WHAT IS 'CONTENT'?

It is the stuff we consume on the web, be it visual, textual, or aural content. Most commonly, it's the written content, photos, music, animation, and designed interaction that we engage with on the web. It can be branded or non-branded, created or curated.

WHAT IS THE 'CONTENT LIFECYCLE'?

Social media isn't just a bunch of communications tools. Instead, perhaps it is more helpful to see them as relationship management tools. As in any relationship, there are different levels of engagement, investment, and mutual interest. As such, the content you send into the world serves different purposes over time. That is the content lifecycle.

The deeper the connection with your audience members, the more meaningful (and mutually reinforcing) your content lifecycle will be. First, you create connections online, then you keep your audience engaged and moving to your strategic goal. Perhaps that is a call to action, promotion for an event, or buying in to a particular idea. From there, you've got to keep feeding them relevant content so they don't move on to another

source (pros sometimes call this maintaining 'mindshare'). Your goal is to deepen your connection with your target audience throughout the content lifecycle for the benefit of your project. There is good news: When doing so, you don't have to produce all that content yourself. You can mix curated with created content, often with significantly better results.

WHAT IS 'CURATION'?

A curator is someone who provides perspective and context for someone else's content. Similar to how a museum makes choices about what to put on display, your social media presence requires someone to select, highlight, and provide context for 'found' online content. Curation is that process: collecting, filtering, organizing, and editorializing other people's content.

Why is it important? Because as we all know, some content posted on the internet is wonderful, but much of it is of poor quality, inaccurate, or irrelevant to your audience. The real issue for your audience is how to find the good stuff. Increasingly, the answer is trusted filters.

After all, isn't that why you show up at the museum in the first place? Because you believe there is something chosen by a curator that is worth experiencing? By providing smart curation for your topic area, it can relieve the heavy burden of content creation on your team, and build your reputation as a 'thought leader' at the same time.

BEST PRACTICES IN CONTENT CURATION

1. BE STRATEGIC. Think about the voice you want for your channel.

2. BE SELECTIVE. Remember that everything you share reflects upon you. Share only the best and most relevant items.

3. SEEK VARIETY. Your feed becomes much more valuable if you mix well-respected sources with more obscure ones.

4. GIVE CREDIT. Ethics matter. People notice over time. Always cite your original sources.

5. ADD VALUE. Context can make a huge difference. Don't be afraid to editorialize intelligently.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF A CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY

To feed your online properties, you need a solid content strategy. Although some of these steps are basic and necessary, other actions are more advanced and require more forethought. In Component 3, we asked a number of communications strategy questions. Here we explore questions of voice, content, and public awareness. Regardless, if you listen, strategize, and assign roles before you act you can increase the likelihood of a successful and engaging social media presence.

KEY CONTENT QUESTIONS

A proper content marketing strategy requires the commitment and clarity of vision to answer the following questions. If you haven't figured out these basics, then you may be able to dip your toe in the social media waters, but don't commit to a long-term plan:

- What do you want to be known for?
- Who is driving the discussion in your field?
- Where are people getting information on your topic now?
- What types of media will you use?
- What is your content mix (created vs. curated, branded vs. non-branded)?
- How frequently can you publish?

> A proper content marketing strategy requires the commitment and clarity of vision

RESEARCH

First things first: One of the strangest realities of the modern internet in this era of expanding access is that the public's appetite for information appears limitless. Successful content marketing requires that you harness that characteristic to your advantage. Although you will have done a high-level assessment when developing your social media plan (see Component 3), your content marketing strategy is much more specifically focused.

To create it, it is critical that you figure out who your audience is, what they look for in content, and what are they passionate about. This is best assembled as a social media landscape assessment.

CONTENT MARKETING VS. SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

In the previous component we talked about strategy in the broad sense of how social media fits within your overall communications strategy and how to select, brand, and launch your channels.

THE BASICS OF A LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

ASSETS – Does your project or organization already have a social media presence? Is it effective? What platforms are you using? Are you generating useful content already, via blog or elsewhere? Do you have a strong existing culture of collaboration? Are internal resources leveraged properly? What are your strongest advantages and disadvantages?

STANDARDS – Survey the field for your peers in the field. How are they doing in terms of their social media followings and effectiveness? How does that inform what success looks like to you?

GUIDELINES – Assemble a list of targeted best practices for any platforms you are thinking about. This information can generally be found freely (of course with some variance in quality) by searching the platform name and 'best practices' and the current year in Google.

TESTING

A ton of variables affect online campaigns. Subject lines, topics, headlines, design, media types, frequency of contacts, platforms, and engagement strategies can all change. The important part is that you track your success or failure, so that you can learn and adapt.

> The important part is that you track your success or failure, and learn from it

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

Before you actually launch your social media channels, you will also want to think about how you plan to measure their effectiveness and how you will adapt your approach to meet the evolving interests of your target

Resource Management

It's important to pre-plan, but to not be too rigid. Some operations prefer to plot content weekly or monthly on a content calendar, but given the value of real time engagement in social media, a broad set of weekly guidelines can be more valuable. In tandem with more meticulous monthly or bi-weekly themes, and 'on the fly' engagement, you can take into account staffing needs. Here's an example of some broad weekly guidelines.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekend
Twitter	#Agriculture Photo Question Photo RT	African link Markets #ICT4D #GlobalDev Our content	#FoodSecurity @ + link #Agriculture Photo Poll	RT Photo Video #ICT4D #M4D	Question RT #AfricaRising @ + link RT	RT Evrgreen link #AfricaRising Photo
Facebook	Photo + Link Video Text question	Food & Dev link Quotable Infographic Our content	Poll question Quotable Link	Partner link Infographic Link + photo	Quotable Video Link	Evrgreen link Poll
Other Accounts	Update Pinterest Curate last week's posts in Tint	Cross post FB link to Google+	Start LinkedIn discussion	Change featured video on YouTube	Hold Google+ video hangout	Find Pinterest content

Of course, this can be as general or specific as desired, but it should roughly approximate the frequency and time requirements for keeping up with your chosen channels.
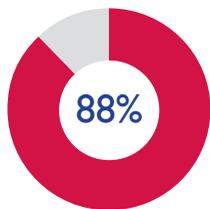
88%

88% [of those surveyed] indicated dissatisfaction with social measurement effectiveness,

52%

52% cited difficulties in accurately measuring ROI as their biggest source of frustration in social marketing

Sharpen your analytical tools

There are a broad range of free social media monitoring and management apps on the web. By comparing what is freely available, it may help you define the best indicators for your project. Here is a good up-to-date list from Dreamgrow.

Note: Most services are 'freemium,' with advanced features requiring payment by credit card.
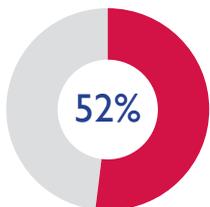
groups. Effectiveness is about much more than just Likes and followers, both of which are fairly passive levels of engagement. To really measure effectiveness, you'll need to look beyond just those indicators.

OPTIMIZING CONTENT

Obviously you do not want to invest resources in something that is not delivering its desired impact. If you are wondering how this is done or if it is even possible, you are not alone. A survey by Adobe Digital Index of 750 marketing professionals in 2011 found that "88% [of those surveyed] indicated dissatisfaction with social measurement effectiveness, and 52% cited difficulties in accurately measuring ROI as their biggest source of frustration in social marketing." That said, there are metrics that will help you to determine how effective your social media efforts are at achieving your communications objectives.

Each of the following metrics can be used to help you measure effectiveness to some degree:

- **LEVEL OF INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT**— This metric captures both the quantity and depth of interaction with your channels. How many people view a post? How many Like it? How many share it? What increased engagement is generated virally through that sharing?
- **BUZZ MONITORING**—This metric measures how people are reacting to a certain idea, service, or resource across a variety of web and social media sites. For example, with Google Alerts you can set up queries of the web for certain key words

(such as "ICT Agriculture Mozambique") and it will email you whenever it is mentioned on the web. Other more premium monitoring services will track online 'sentiment' in a more advanced manner, for a monthly fee.

- **INFLUENCE**—Some question the validity of influence tracking, since the leading measures are proprietary and non-transparent. But they do claim to gauge how influential you are relative to other channels, especially in regards to how people engage with your content. One of the leading free indicators for influence is Klout, but there are several others.
- **WEBSITE ANALYTICS**—If you are using social media to help direct traffic to your website, then tracking website analytics can help you determine how effective your social media channels are at driving traffic to your website. For knowledge sharing projects that may track website visits or document downloads, being able to track how well social media contributes to those indicators can be quite helpful. One of the most robust (and free) analytics tools is Google Analytics.
- **BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND PERSONAL FEEDBACK**—Measuring knowledge and behavior change through social media can be done much the same as it would be done for offline engagements, using polls, surveys, and even digital focus groups using platforms such as Skype or Google Hangouts. Reaching out to your most enthusiastic followers with a phone call can often be a great way to hear their feedback and reinforce the importance of those key relationships. Regardless, this should be done consistent with the instruments you use for offline

ON TRACKING BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Tracking behavior change online is just as difficult as it is offline. For example, there are companies that claim to be able to determine behavior change by tracking changes in what individuals are saying online. Though this 'sentiment analysis' can be associated with behavior change, it does not definitively mean that behavior change has taken place. We all know people who espouse ideas that they agree with, even if they don't actually adopt that behavior. This is not to say that those services are not worthwhile, but rather to encourage you to do your due diligence before paying for any of these types of services.

Response rates
for surveys sent
out via social
media can be low

engagements so that whatever data you are gathering are consistent with the data you collect from your in-person activities. Response rates for surveys sent out via social media can be low, since unlike in-person activities you have a much less captive audience. Therefore, you may want to think about offering some sort of incentive, such as a randomly drawn prize for one respondent.

Thinking through which of these metrics you will use to measure the effectiveness of your social media channels very much depends on what your goals and objectives are, although you will likely want to consider using each of these to some extent. Finding the right balance depends on how much time your team has and what resources you have available. Though many of these metrics can be measured using free tools, there are also a number of subscription-based services that offer a more detailed level of analysis and information. In many cases, these services operate on a freemium model where they offer a limited level of access for free, with

additional features available on a paid, subscription basis. The following comparison illustrates the difference between free and paid subscription services for measuring effectiveness on Twitter to give you an idea of how some of these services differ.

	TweetReach Free	TweetReach Pro
Cost	Free	$84 - $899/month, depending on how many Twitter feeds or issues you want to track
What it gives you	Provides estimated reach and exposure to past 50 tweets	Provides estimated reach and exposure to all of your tweets, and detailed historical analytical data.
When to use	If you do not need historical data and are satisfied with manually tracking changes to reach and exposure over time	If you want to be able to quickly and visually analyze current and historical data to inform future content decisions and track reach and exposure over time

Deciding upon
whether you
need to pay
for a service or
can get all of
the data you
need from free
tools depends
on what data
you are planning
to collect

Deciding upon whether you need to pay for a service or can get all of the data you need from free tools depends on what data you are planning to collect. You may find that using a worksheet like the one below is helpful for determining how you will measure each of your primary indicators and what resources you need to do so. In many cases, these indicators will feed into broader indicators that you are reporting against, so your targets in this case are your targets for the social media contribution to that indicator—although you may also have social media-specific goals, such as influence, that are not necessarily directly related to your broader project indicators. This can also be used once you have launched your social media efforts to help you assess progress and how you need to adapt, if necessary.

Indicator	Relevance*	How will it be measured?	Who will be responsible?	What are our targets?	Resources required
Number of documents downloaded from website	Essential	Download tracker on website	Knowledge Management Officer	1,000 downloads per quarter resulting from social media referral	Staff time, analytics program to track downloads
Number of individuals adopting improved practices	Important	Through stakeholder surveys Answer choices will be added under 'What influenced your decision to adopt?' to include social media channels	M&E Officer	100 individuals per year from social media, representing at least 10% of total	Will need an online survey tool so that we can distribute the survey online as well as in person
Average daily and monthly number of contributors to social forum	Important	A manual daily count of users who accessed the channel and made a change	Communications Specialist	Grow from an average of 2–10 contributors/per day in next six months	Staff time
On a monthly basis, number of users who are "very active" (defined as 4 online interactions or more)	Important	Aggregating all available analytics and cross checking with platform history to provide one discrete number	Intern	Grow from 5 to 30 'very active' users per month by July 15	Intern staff time to collect, clean, and organize data
Increase brand value that social media deliver to the project	Not possible	Purchase subscription analytics dashboard tracking project % 'mindshare' for our audience versus baseline data from 2005 Cross- referenced with field M&E data tracking positive and negative views of project among 'likely' and confirmed social media users in our target regions	Survey firm, M&E consultant, Implementation Science Officer	Increase positive mentions of the project from survey field results by 4.5X in the next calendar year	Significant budget for staff time, contract survey firm, subscriptions to dashboard and demographic research data

* Essential, Important, Not important, Not possible

Indicator	Relevance*	How will it be measured?	Who will be responsible?	What are our targets?	Resources required

By establishing and tracking your social media targets against these indicators, you will be able to get a sense of how effective your efforts are, especially as compared to your other communications efforts. Of course, for some things this is fairly simple, while for others—such as behavior change—it is significantly more complex to measure effectiveness. What you are able to measure will ultimately depend on what resources you have available and what data you realistically have access to collect.

In addition to helping you gauge whether your social media efforts are effective, the fast-paced and dynamic nature of social media makes it possible to monitor engagement and make adaptations in near real-time. That said, real-time monitoring of your social media engagement can take a lot of time and manpower. It can also be extremely distracting.

> The fast-paced and dynamic nature of social media makes it possible to monitor engagement and make adaptations in near real-time

You will find that social media rewards an immediate and accessible online persona. You may find yourself checking Twitter, for example, every few minutes to see if anyone has retweeted you yet. Realistically, you may want to schedule specific times to monitor the interactions with your channels on a periodic basis. This can be multiple times a day or weekly, depending on your time, efficiency, and needs. Whatever you decide, make sure that you have calculated the amount of time this will require and include it within the roles and responsibilities of your team members. The amount of time this will require will obviously vary depending on how extensive your reach is and how engaged your target audience is.

Questions you will want to ask when conducting this ongoing monitoring include:

- Who is talking about you?
  - How influential are they?
- What are they saying?
  - Are they supportive or skeptical?
- What is the message sentiment?
  - Positive, negative, neutral?
- How far has your message spread?
  - How much engagement has it generated?

For a useful template, take a look at this Listening Report Template from Beth Kanter at Beth's Blog.

TESTING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Once you have conducted a landscape assessment, it can be very valuable to gather a small group to discuss whether these conclusions make sense in the real world. Whether you call in favors from colleagues, discuss it at agricultural field days, or reach out to a select group via email or phone, this ad-hoc 'focus group' can provide insights that will not be available online. Because statistics can be notoriously unreliable, especially on the African continent, it is important to test your assumptions with potential users who may deliver relevant on-the-ground insights.

One specific method utilized by the Agrilinks team is to build in a session around a specific event related to their target audience, such as a professional conference, and create incentives for participants to

attend a session where they can inquire on their social media use and impressions of their plans. The incentive itself can take many forms: Perhaps it is a personal connection, a meal, or a relevant raffle prize. Regardless, it is important to make this session time-limited out of respect for their schedule.

Such real world intelligence can confirm your previous ideas or completely blow up your plans. Both should be seen as favorable outcomes if they make your final initiative better. The important part is that you are able to hear, synthesize, and address comments from informed members of your target audience in an iterative fashion. You do not need to follow their advice to the letter, but rather consider it along with the bouquet of other information you have collected.

TAKE NOTE OF SURPRISES

As you begin to experiment with your tactics, outcomes are bound to surprise you. It is part of the iterative process. That feedback should guide your team's efforts, rather than repeating the same tactics because 'it's in the communications plan.' Some topics or media formats or types of framing may prove more or less popular. Learn from it. Also, ask key channel-specific questions:

• How does your content compare to your competitors?
• Are you filling a niche effectively?
• Is there enough variety on your channel to expand your circle?
• Is your content focused enough on your core areas?

Don't rely on any one set of measures and don't be afraid to ask for direct feedback or help from your audience. As your data set grows, trends will emerge. You should be able to translate those trends into

producing more of what your audience wants, and less of what it ignores. Although it won't happen in the first month, with enough time, you will develop an informed intuition.

REPACKAGE AND REUSE

Your original content is the jewel in your differentiator in an infinite amount of curated content. It takes more resources and time to conceive, write, edit, shoot, record, or program the stuff, so you need to make it count. It also differentiates you from other competitive sources. If you use the content in different ways, it is much more efficient.

After all, we know that humans have different learning styles. Some people prefer text, others audio, still others video. Infographics can often display huge amounts of information in pleasing ways, while allowing for multiple tweets or posts from the same data. Some people will not want to listen to a long podcast, but may enjoy 90-second clips of the same material.

Further, we know that repetition has tremendous power. The entire global advertising industry is based on it. At any one time, just a fraction of your audience is online—so you can try posting or posing questions at different hours of the day or night (after all, other continents might be interested in your work as well).

CONTENT TYPES

For the purposes of this guide, we have divided content into three categories: 'Short-form', 'long-form', and 'versatile'. Though these boundaries are malleable, it is helpful to think through your mix of content. Generally speaking, the more diversity you include in your channels, the better. But it is also critical to examine the level of effort required for different content types. In framing content this way, we aim to encourage a realistic approach as to your capacity.

Below you will also note examples of both created and curated content ideas for each category. Notice that social media-specific content is listed as one content category itself, because each platform can have unique and notable characteristics, rules, and behaviors, while many other content types listed here live independently on the web. This is not to say that independent content is isolated—it is not. This is only to say that social media status lines, shares, text chats, and the like can spread significantly on their own—and disseminate your message as they do.

ONE NOTE: *Increasingly, it is less important where your content 'lives' and more important that it is linked and immediately available via your channels. Your content should be consistently integrated (be sure to pick and test interoperability) with links back to your website, email signup, and other social media channels.*

> Social media status lines, shares, text chats, and the like can spread significantly on their own

SHORT-FORM CONTENT – TOPICAL AND TIMELY

You will likely find that short-form content becomes the heart of your social media efforts. By sharing concise chunks of content that deliver informational value in engaging ways, short-form content is most often the public's 'way in' to your project. Including links to further resources at the end of a good piece can also help you to build a higher online profile. In this category, news value takes on special prominence.

Blogs

The core of many social media operations are blogs and their posts (such as discrete posts containing any manner of content), but typically listed in chronological order. Thanks to embedding, blogs may contain virtually any content from the web, but at the core are composed and concise text entries.

Created
- original writing and images
- interviews
- guest posts

Curated
- wrap-up posts
- crowd-sourced posts
- event notes/summary
- re-blogged posts

> The core of many social media operations are blogs and their posts
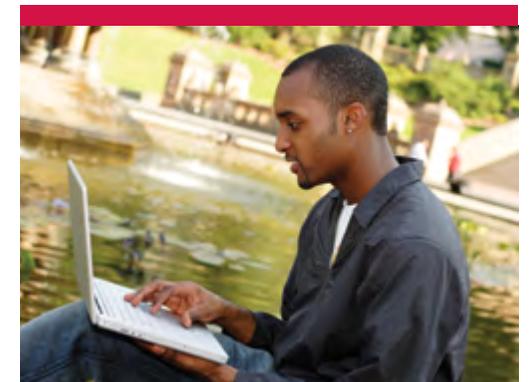
Email Newsletters

Although email is often not seen as a social tool, it is still the one of the most effective ways of building community. Response rates for opt-in email, where recipients have signed on to your list, are much higher than all but the most viral social media posts. A big advantage of email is being able to easily segment your audience and deliver different messages to each. There are many free cloud-based email providers, while customer relationship management (CRMs) tools can provide enterprise-level tracking of email outcomes.

Created
- announcements
- event-related content
- behind-the-scenes

Curated
- top 10 most popular social media posts
- blog week-in-review
- content partnership links

Social media-specific content

This category is bound only by the limits of your imagination and your platform. With every new feature that appears, some content marketer will figure out how to use it to spread their message. Below is a very selective list.

Created
- links to your original content
- images

- conversations
- curation plugins (such as Tint)
- quote graphics—graphically presented sound bites that present key quotes and are often shared virally on Pinterest, Tumblr, Facebook

Curated
- Likes, shares, retweets, reblogs on your channels
- any third-party content

FURTHER RESOURCE: If you are interested in visual media, Hubspot's Crash Course to Visual Content Creation (free, but behind an email registration requirement) is a great guide to get you started.

"Being a farmer means shaking hands with nature"

Credit: Tama

Selected Crowdsourcing Curation Tools
- Storify
- RebelMouse
- Paper.li
- Scoop.it

Interesting third-party image and text tools
- Recite this
- Pinstamatic
- Pinwords

LONG-FORM CONTENT

We know from behavioral science that much of the web is scanned while users multitask. Most short-form content tends to only keep our attention for a few seconds. We think of long-form content as a more lasting contribution to your project communications efforts. If well-conceived and executed, long-form content will inspire concentration and reflection on your topic, but often requires a significant amount of development time, creativity, and revision.

Presentations

Although some common PowerPoint presentations can be repurposed to the web or social networks, the flexibility of the web has brought about more compelling multimedia options as well.

One example: In partnership with the team at USAID's Agrilinks, our project created two web-based multimedia presentations on innovations in ICT for agriculture. These attracted significantly more attention than an average content item posted on our content partner sites, but took considerable staff time over weeks to collect, create, and edit.

@ICTforAg Projeqt Presentations
Kilimo Salama [Opening slide image] 3,026 total views
Freedom Fone [Opening slide image] 1,000 total views

Selected web based presentation platforms
- Projeqt
- Slideshare
- Prezi

EBooks/Special Reports

There are numerous web-first publishing platforms that enable users to export different versions of the same content for print, e-books, and other media. The best of these platforms work seamlessly and give users the ability to layout their preferences with minimal hassle.

Infographics

These are graphic visual representations of knowledge intended to present complex information in an easily digestible manner. The best Infographics combine esthetic and narrative sensibilities with quality data synthesis. They are not easy to create, and often take longer than expected, but can have tremendous value when successfully executed.

RESOURCE: Idealware's Infographics for Outreach, Advocacy, and Marketing: From Data to Design (free, but behind an email registration requirement).

Webinars

Webinars can provide the immediacy of a live event with the potential scale of a geographically disbursed audience and the interactivity of the internet. Many platforms exist, but the most popular are Adobe Connect, GoToMeeting, and BlackBoard Collaborate. In particular, well-edited recordings make for valuable content resources on social media.

RESOURCE: For an interesting introduction to conducting online events, view this talk from Zachary Banquet of USAID: Transforming Social Media and Learning into Social Learning.

Selected 'web-first' platforms:
- PressBooks
- Lulu
- BookType

ZACHARY BANQUET

KILIMO SALAMA   FREEDOM FONE

Audio programming has the advantage of allowing users to conduct other activities while listening

Audio Broadcasts/Podcasts

Podcasts can be streamed online, but most are downloaded to personal devices. As audio programming has the advantage of allowing users to conduct other activities while listening (i.e. farming, commuting) and better reaching the illiterate, it is another unique means of promoting your work via a multichannel strategy.

For more information on creating audio content and using mobile technology to engage users, see USAID's FACET project's toolkit on Interactive Radio for Agricultural Development Practitioners.

RESOURCE: For an overview on tools and techniques of podcasting, see Informly's The Ultimate Beginners Guide to Podcasting.

VERSATILE CONTENT

Video

Two decades ago, professional quality video required expensive equipment, software, and staff time. Today, newly affordable and available technology has democratized the medium around the world. Agricultural videos can be created in the field by your staff, the cost will be lower than professionally produced videos, and the turnaround time from concept to final product will likely be much faster. It can also be created in short bits, inside specially designed social media mobile apps like Instagram and Vine.

Created
- Original video can vary from six second snippets shot and edited on mobile phone to feature length documentaries.
- A YouTube or other social channel can generate significant exposure for your original materials.

Curated
- Mashups of other's content can generate buzz (but be careful of copyright issues).
- Curate one video clip at a time on your social channels.

RESOURCE: USAID's FACET project Low Cost Video for Agricultural Development Practitioners provides a useful set of approaches for getting started in video using low-cost and free tools.

Polls

A clever poll, with an instant payoff, can be an excellent way to boost engagement within social media sites and generate interest in further content. It can also serve as an excellent data collection tool, especially to get to know the tastes of your audience.

Created
- For data collection, one can carefully craft surveys on SurveyMonkey or others that can be written up into synthesis or a report.
- Many social platforms offer the opportunity to do a quick one- to three-question poll to engage the audience or to embed in blog posts.

Curated
- Using hashtags, one can ask a question to followers on Twitter and correlate the results in a blog post.
- Pose a question on Quora with a link to your site.

C

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Social media are essential elements in the future of development work. In 2013, the tools and tactics of social media are still emerging as a complementary channel for a variety of communications. But increasingly, it is clear that this will not always be the case and the uses for social media are expanding.

In the halcyon early days of social media, development professionals reaped significant benefits in terms of reputation, followers, and website traffic by simply having an active social media presence. Today, the game has changed. Initiatives require more forethought, planning, and responsiveness than ever to make connections with the online public. There will be no turning back. Just as it is difficult to shout in a crowd, you must get people's attention in the smartest and most strategic way possible.

One important idea to remember: None of this is all that new. At least since the days of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, information has been traveling virally.[1] Modern social networks just do it more quickly and immediately, and with good content, you can spread your messages around the world in very short order.

Social media were introduced to the world with hype of any new consumer technology supported by the private sector, rapid technological change, and genuine public excitement. What seemed in the late 1990s like a bit of magical thinking is now increasingly considered as an accepted new media channel that can be used to support agricultural development.

1. "Social media in the 16th Century. How Luther went viral." *The Economist.* 17 December 2011.

In the medium term, some fluency in social media will be a requirement for projects aiming to communicate with the public, including farmers. In the meantime, it represents an opportunity to innovate, make mistakes and learn from them, to get ahead of the curve. Now is the time to begin shaping your channels and learning from your inevitable challenges. Ultimately, that is the most promising means to create a community that will support your project goals.

Some fluency in social media will be a requirement for projects aiming to communicate with the public, including farmers
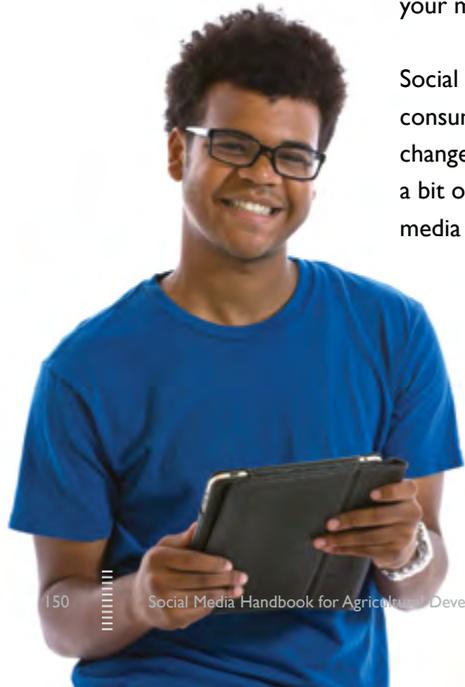
Nine Steps to Social Media Success

1. **Understand your options —**
   focus on locally relevant options, potential benefits and challenges

2. **Know your audience —**
   who [are they?], what [are their needs?], and where, when, how, and why [are they using social media?]

3. **Clearly define your goals —**
   be self-critical and realistic

4. **Choose the right platforms —**
   meet your audience where they are or where they are going

5. **Brand wisely —**
   choose a brand that is reflective of your goals

6. **Encourage experimentation —**
   test out new ideas, constantly

7. **Diversify your content —**
   keep your content fresh and engaging

8. **Never stop learning —**
   the next new 'thing' is just around the corner

9. **Refine, refine, refine —**
   your approach should be ever evolving

SOCIAL MEDIA HANDBOOK

for Agricultural Development Practitioners