Social Media In The Pavement Industry

Introduction

Most road agency team members were not thinking about social media when they earned their degrees or certifications. Today, for many, social media may not be viewed as relevant to projects that are managed, though should it be? Today everyone has a phone or tablet or other device readily available. Effective communication is more critical, as rapid sharing of information is the norm. This norm is fueled by social media. In short, social media is a platform(s) that enables more instantaneous communication with the public. It plays a role in many aspects (knowledge sharing, project updates, etc.) of the paving industry.

Getting Started

There are lots ways to utilize social media platforms. It is virtually impossible to be effective on all platforms. The approach that ACPA has taken is to be effective by delivering good content on three platforms. These include Facebook (community messaging), LinkedIn (for business to business information sharing) and Twitter (for instant updates or quick news and announcements). Every agency must evaluate both what they can effectively manage and how they will carry their social media plan forward.

How Highway/Municipalities/Road Building Agencies Use Social Media

Social media has become an important way for agencies to communicate with motorists and others. Like most states, California's state highway department, CALTRANS, has a strong social media presence, at the headquarters office, as well as among its districts throughout the state. This enables the districts to report on road issues that include maintenance, and detours, as well as provide immediate updates such as an accident, or road closure.

The Indiana (InDOT) Department of Transportation also uses social media effectively to provide information, video, maps, and other images to emphasize the importance of safety in work zones, help drivers avoid closures and accident investigations, to communicate seasonal messages, and more. InDOT also collaborates with the state police to help provide additional community information.

When we take a closer look at CALTRANS and InDOT and other highway departments, we see positive examples of using social media to help keep the public better informed than ever before. By sharing this information, people become more than just motorists, they often become advocates. Especially when they share the information with their own networks. This is one of the primary advantages of social media, and these examples represent effective and positive use of social media. ACPA endorses the use of social media as an important part of public outreach, education and communications.

Although social media is not substitute for other forms of communication, it is an increasingly important and vital to keeping motorists, taxpayers, businesses and other stakeholders informed. When used properly, social media can be an inexpensive (even free) and highly effective way to communicate messages quickly to the traveling public, and businesses in and around project area(s).

ACPA Offers Resources To Support Social Media Programs

As an advocate for sharing information as well as promoting fair and healthy competition, ACPA supports agencies and their respective social media platforms. As part of this support, content can be made available to help agencies provide information to their followers. ACPA also has several programming tools to help provide education on topics that include resiliency, sustainability, and healthy competition. These tools are available for any road agency or consulting agency to utilize if needed. Please contact ACPA for more details.

Summary

Years ago, we called it simply communication, today its effective communication through social media. Everything happens in real time. ACPA offers support, content and insights for any road agency looking to expand or manage their social media program. As social media continues to evolve, the practices of straight forward conversation will bridge the emerging new technologies. Using social media as part of an overall communication/ education strategy is an effective way to strengthen your message with the community.

We also encourage agencies, industry, academia, and others with an interest in safe, efficient highways and roadways to join the discussion by following us on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

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