

Use of social media for sharing invasive species information

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Summary Social media, like other forms of communication, can be used effectively to share information about invasive species. The popular contemporary social media include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others. Invasive species practitioners working for government agencies have typically been prevented from using social media to talk about their work. For some agencies, this is changing and staff are being encouraged to share their work following guidelines for appropriate social media use.

Social media can be an effective form of communication for invasive species practitioners allowing people to reach a global audience of varied experiences and knowledge. Apart from shared information about invasive species, there are social and mental health benefits.

Keywords Facebook, hashtags, Instagram, Twitter, social media, Yammer, YouTube.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of using social media can be many. This paper is not attempting to be a general social media user guide – there are plenty of these available online. It is highlighting some of the social media uses and benefits for sharing information specifically about invasive species.

SOCIAL MEDIA HINTS

Why are YOU using social media? It is worth thinking about why you are using social media and what your expectations are.

Depending on what you are aiming for will influence how you use social media. Is it to have influence, to be popular, to learn, to share, to have conversations, to spy on your kids, or to fill the time? Maybe a combination of many things.

These are four of my late father's (Doug Blood) principles that I try to consider often and are part of the reason I use social media and mobile technology:

- What are the possibilities?
- Collaboration.
- Don't be put off by challenges.
- Use technology and be an early adopter.

I use social media professionally to promote my work, increase awareness about invasive species, share my

knowledge, learn about what others are doing in this field, expand my understanding, broaden my knowledge of the wider biodiversity and environmental field in which I work and live, and connect with others so I don't feel isolated.

Separating personal from professional After using social media for some time personally, I increasingly found that I was sharing information about invasive species and was finding a wider audience of people with similar interests. I was always cautious about communicating about my work and frustratingly avoided it for the most part.

I expressed my desire to be able to communicate about my work through my agency, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and it coincided with a pilot for the use of social media by staff called #openmic. Through the #openmic pilot and with the permission of the steering group of the project I work on (Weeds at the Early Stage of Invasion), I was able to communicate about my work on social media.

I had already commenced separating my personal profiles on the different media and created a professional presence on the same media to keep them apart. I created a 'handle' that was available on all the media to keep things simple @weedyk8.

It is more time consuming monitoring and using the different accounts, however, it suits me to keep them separate.

Finding your voice and community It can take a while to 'find your voice' on social media. Your style, content, and how you let your personality come through in your writing and images takes time to develop.

Finding a community of people you connect and feel comfortable with can help you find your voice. When you can relax and be yourself within the framework of your agency's requirements is when the most fruitful engagement can take place.

When you find meaningful connections with others it can be beneficial to look at the people they follow to expand your network further. Searching on topics of interest using hashtags (see below) can open up further rich seams of connections. Following the

feeds of people attending conferences relevant to your field and the conference hashtag e.g. #20awc can be interesting.

Building an audience Creating a social media profile and then not using it generally does not generate any connections. To build an audience takes time to actively find and connect with the people of mutual interest. What you put in to making connections and creating content will influence what you get out.

‘Following’ and ‘liking’ the people and agencies you are interested in will often result in a reciprocal ‘follow’ or ‘like’. It is not compulsory to follow people who follow you first. Search on social media etiquette. It can be beneficial to unfollow and unlike people or agencies that are no longer of interest.

These are some of the people/agencies I follow on Twitter that post regular information about invasive species: @GoodenBen @TimDoherty_ @Lorax Cate @ManuSaunders @ISCAustralia @tasbiophilic @WoNS_weeds. There are many links in the appendix.

Creating your own content that you post through your own channels, and sharing relevant posts from others e.g. ‘retweeting’ on Twitter or ‘sharing’ on Facebook is a good way of building a following (if that is the aim).

My principles are to be respectful, factual, be responsible for what I post, limit my personal opinions and attribute sources of information I share when it is appropriate to share them.

Challenges The internet has lots of content about many topics that may be offensive or illegal. The same goes for social media. Through the effective use of ‘blocking’ tools, it is possible to exclude many people and bots (automated computer software applications) from your feed. You do have to be vigilant and monitor your feed to pick them up quickly.

Use of the word ‘weed’ does attract people and bots that are interested in drug use, hence the use of alternative terms such as ‘invasive species’. I use both and block those followers I am not interested in.

Inevitably, you will be followed and linked to by people/sites that promote drug use. I try to be very vigilant and block all these users immediately. I try to remember every 4–6 weeks to review my follower list and block the ones I missed earlier.

Social media can be a time stealer. There is advice available on how to monitor and control the time spent using social media if it becomes an issue. There is advice available on avoiding interruption to sleep patterns. Try the screen-dimming function on mobile devices that you can set for a certain time each evening to reduce brain stimulation from screen glare.

Equally, social media can be a good distraction while you are having to wait in queues, when the television offering is a bit thin in the evenings, or while travelling.

For a new user of social media, it can be daunting and intimidating while you learn the lingo, avoid pitfalls and get with the flow.

For many people privacy concerns are the main reason for not using social media. I make the assumption that anyone anywhere is reading my material and looking at my images. I write and photograph accordingly. I don’t post material that I want to keep private. I am conscience of the privacy of others including who I photograph. Regularly read and review the privacy settings on the social media you use.

Keep your wits about you to avoid scams and identity theft. Don’t believe everything you read and check people out carefully before engaging with them if you feel concerned.

Which social media to use? It really depends on what you are after. I find a combination of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram suit me well. Our Department has an internal Yammer network that I use to promote our work and learn about what is going on around the State.

Try a few different media and see what combination suits you.

I first started using Facebook personally, then as my confidence grew I started using Twitter. As my professional use grew I created separate professional accounts. I wanted to try Instagram so created a personal account first, learnt how to use it and then created my professional Instagram account.

Search terms including hashtags Hashtags are a form of search term. The # symbol in front of a continuous string of letters or words makes it a live search term that can be clicked on to bring up posts in which others have used the same hashtag. It helps to find people that you can connect with or posts about the same topic you are interested in.

On Twitter, these are the hashtags I typically use:

- #invasivespecies. I sometimes abbreviate this to #invssp and I note others use #invsp. I like the longer term #invasivespecies as it removes any confusion about the intended topic.
- #weeds [expect to have to sift through lots of drug posts!].
- #weedid [for weed identification].
- #scicomm for science communication.

Tweeting from conferences There are heaps of hints on Twitter (links to papers and blogs) about Tweeting

from conferences. It is good fun, shares with others who cannot attend, is a form of note taking that I then share back in meetings with people I work with, and it promotes sharing information and raising awareness about invasive species.

Pia Lentini (2013) has some good advice about Tweeting and conferences: <https://pentiniresearch.wordpress.com/2013/08/27/a-plea-to-make-conferences-more-twitter-friendly/>

Hints on choosing hashtags for events When planning a conference, field trip or other event, think carefully about a hashtag that can be used to promote and use during the event.

Choose carefully and consider a term with not too many characters, it's easy to remember, and ALWAYS test first to see if it is already being used. Then promote it to make sure everyone uses the same hashtag.

Social media research This paper is by no means a comprehensive research paper on the use of social media for invasive species. It is based on my experiences. I have come upon this paper (Daume 2016) that looks at the use of Twitter to monitor invasive species. For those wishing to look further into this topic, the Daume (2016) paper has a list of references for those wanting a toe into the topic.

CONCLUSION

If you haven't used social media before, I hope this information encourages you to give it a try. If you only use social media personally, consider using it professionally if you have the permission to do so.

For me, I learn a lot through social media, broaden my networks and I find it is great for my mental well-being – I don't feel isolated working on a topic where there are few co-workers. Most of all, it is good to share my knowledge and observations of what I see in the field.

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The social media audiences I engage with are generally supportive and enter into communication in a positive and sharing spirit.

REFERENCES

- Daume, S. (2016). Mining Twitter to monitor invasive alien species – an analytical framework and sample information topologies. *Ecological Informatics* 31, 70-82.
- Lentini, P. (2013). <https://pentiniresearch.wordpress.com/2013/08/27/a-plea-to-make-conferences-more-twitter-friendly/> (viewed online 8/8/2016).

APPENDIX

These are some social media links that may be of interest. It is not a comprehensive list. Follow the threads and networks to explore your specific interests.

Kate Blood social media:

- <https://twitter.com/weedyk8>
<https://www.facebook.com/weedyk8>
<https://www.instagram.com/weedyk8/>

Australasian Weeds Conference:

- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/austweedsconf>
Facebook: Australasian Weeds Conference
Search terms: #20awc

Weed Societies in Australia:

- Facebook: Tasmanian Weeds
Facebook: The Weed Society of Victoria Inc
Facebook: Weed Management Society of South Australia 5th Conference

These are some social media (and web links) recommendations made by members of the Aliens-L email listserver in June 2016 (Note: Listing here doesn't mean endorsement. There are also many links that can be found by seeing who each of these people/agencies follow and who follow them):

Pests and Weeds Victoria Australia Facebook group:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1427695277483336/>

Facebook: Bush Revegetation and Regeneration group
Facebook: NSW Native Plant Identification group
Facebook: Weeds in West Gippsland group

Facebook: Wet Tropics Management Authority Yellow Crazy Ant Program: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ycawetropics/>

Facebook: Invasive Species South Africa <https://www.facebook.com/invasivespeciessouthafrica/>

Facebook: Cape Town Invasives
<https://www.facebook.com/ctinvasives/>

Twitter:

[@InvasivesZA](https://twitter.com/InvasivesZA) <https://twitter.com/InvasivesZA>

The Center for Invasive Species Prevention invasive species blog: www.cisp.us

CONICET (the National Scientific Council), and the Ministry of Science in Argentina Facebook pages: Marine-Coastal Exotic Species Guide for Argentina
Facebook: [@GEAC.CONICET](https://www.facebook.com/GEAC.CONICET)

<https://www.facebook.com/MudpuppyNight/> have recent posts about alien crayfish.

<https://twitter.com/wildlifeinwater>

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Twitter feed specifically on aquatic invasive species in Ireland and internationally and promotes biosecurity issues with stakeholders: twitter.com/aisireland

National Invasive Species Committee of Palau:
www.palaunisc.org

Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII) Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/Pacific-Invasives-Initiative-PII-109320925778960/>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kaitiaki-o-Ngahere/162171857214996>

CABI has an invasive species blog and social media:
<https://cabiinvasives.wordpress.com/>
https://twitter.com/cabi_invasives
<https://www.facebook.com/CABI.development>

The IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) Thematic Group Ecosystems and Invasive Species Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IUCN-CEM-Ecosystems-and-Invasive-Species-154657961556106/>
Theme Leader on Twitter: [@judithfish](https://twitter.com/judithfish)

Website: <http://geaccenpat.wix.com/geac>

The Smithsonian Institution
Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL)
IUCN
California Academy of Science
The Nature Conservancy
News from Science (Magazine)
ISSG (Invasive Species Specialists Group)