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How Much Should I Rely on Social Media?

This Better Buildings Residential Network toolkit can be used to help residential energy efficiency programs learn to engage potential customers through social media. Social media can build brand awareness concerning home energy upgrades and the entities working on them, which can lead to more energy upgrade projects taking place in the long run. Residential Network members provided input and review for this toolkit.

This toolkit will help program managers and their staff with decisions like what social media works best for various program needs. When aligned with other marketing and outreach efforts, social media can be a useful tool in attracting home energy upgrade customers. Note that social media changes constantly, so users of this toolkit need to regularly reassess their methods and review results to

ensure goals are being met. A reference in this toolkit may be relevant today, in terms of the percentage of Pinterest users who are women for example, but may change in real time. The resources in this toolkit are representative and reflect well-known social media brands, but are not exhaustive. Links to additional resources are included for more information.

Send your feedback concerning this toolkit and your social media efforts to [bbresidentialnetwork@ee.doe.gov](mailto:bbresidentialnetwork@ee.doe.gov) so the Better Buildings Residential Network can develop more valuable resources, and share the great work members are doing.

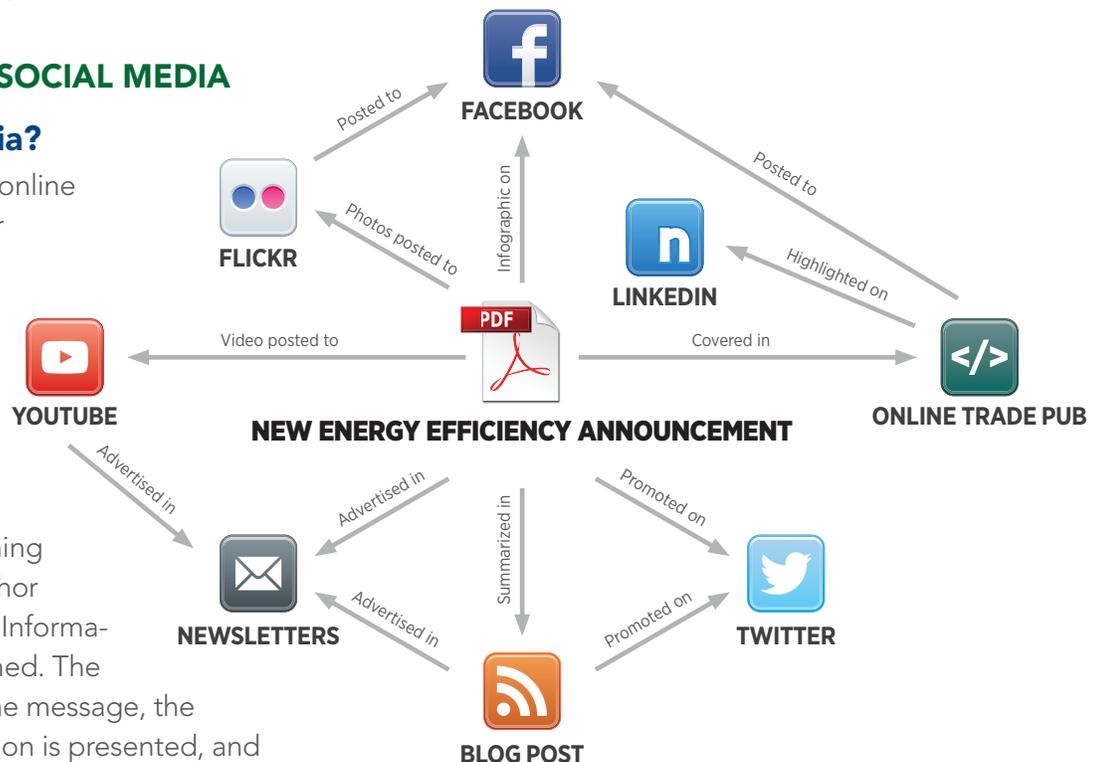
## UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

### What is social media?

Social media is a set of online tools that make it easier to create, curate, and share ideas.

### How is social media different from other publishing tools?

Most traditional publishing is one-way, with the author speaking to the reader. Information is passively consumed. The author is in control of the message, the order in which information is presented, and the visual display of the information.



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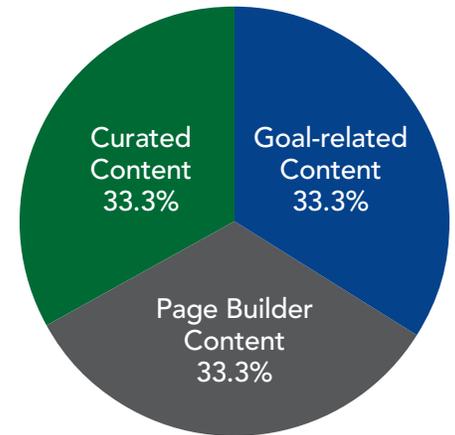
With social media, communication becomes two-way, and authors lose much of their control. Readers can easily become authors by leaving comments, retweeting, liking, or replying to posts. That two-way dynamic means that the real power of social media lies in its ability to generate conversations rather than simply allow one to broadcast.

### How do social media and messaging work together?

Social media has to be part of an [integrated strategy](#), one in which you push out your message in appropriate formats across a variety of channels.

Social media works best when it is conversational. Ideally, around one-third of a program’s content will be goal content (i.e., your message); another one-third will be page builder content (i.e., content that helps to build the program’s brand but that is not aimed at a specific goal like driving traffic to a post or generating leads); and one-third curated content (i.e., other people’s content that is relevant to your brand/campaign).

**SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT**



### Is there anything I need to do before using social media?

Most organizations use social media to advertise or support website content—that is, to get people to buy things you sell, read things you publish, or do things you advocate. For any social media campaign to work well, your underlying content must provide value for users. If your website doesn’t answer the questions people are asking, or if it makes them work hard to find the answer because your content is buried, then don’t use social media.

[Get your content right](#) before utilizing social media.

Time is also an important factor to take into account when considering a new social media undertaking. How long do you intend to be active on social media? How many hours a week can you put in, and which staff will have it as a responsibility? Social media is a commitment. Starting a presence on social media, and then not having the bandwidth to maintain it at the level needed could end up backfiring, making your program look worse than if it didn’t do anything at all.

### How do I choose which social media channels to use?

For any sort of marketing campaign, there are two basic questions:

- ▶ What information do I want to communicate (i.e., what is my message)?
- ▶ [To whom do I want to communicate it](#) (i.e., who is my audience)?

You must have detailed answers to these questions before you choose your social media channels. Once you have considered the answers to these questions, review the following (non-exhaustive) list of social networks to see which ones might be best for your program.

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## SOCIAL NETWORK EXAMPLES

### Facebook

#### EXAMPLES

- ▶ **Greater Cincinnati Energy Alliance:** “Up to \$1,500 off solar installations for City of Cincinnati residents! For a limited-time only. #solar”
- ▶ **AFC First:** “0.00% APR Rate for Energize Connecticut Heating Loans Extended Through October 31, 2015  
Great News! The 0% interest rate will now remain in effect for all loan applications received through October 31, 2015. (The rate was originally scheduled to expire on May 31, 2015.) That gives you more time to market and use this dynamic tool to help customers upgrade their heating systems at this fantastic no-cost rate.  
Are Your Customers Taking Advantage of this Great Program?”

#### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLATFORM

- ▶ Facebook is not a place for publishers to broadcast content. It is built for readers to filter content.
  - > “How Facebook Is Changing the Way Its Users Consume Journalism”
- ▶ Your content will reach only about 6% of your fans (unless you pay for advertising.)
  - > “Facebook is Still Failing Marketers”
- ▶ Facebook has one of the largest digital ad platforms in existence with a potential audience of 1.3 billion people. Size of audience reach is important to take into consideration when determining use of an advertising budget.
  - > “Mobile Makes Facebook Just an App; That’s Great News”
- ▶ Facebook’s size is its strength, so it is valuable if your primary goal is to drive traffic. Facebook drives about one-fourth of all traffic to the Web.
  - > “In Q2 [2014], Facebook Drove 23.39% of Overall Visits to Sites”

#### HOW TO USE THIS PLATFORM WELL

- ▶ Add pictures to improve engagement (i.e., likes, comments, click-throughs<sup>1</sup>.) Add links to drive more people to your content.
  - > “Is Facebook Throttling the Reach of Image Posts?”
- ▶ Upload video directly to Facebook. Video uploaded natively in Facebook outperforms video that is shared from YouTube.
  - > “Watch Out, YouTube: Brands Have Discovered Facebook Video”
- ▶ Aim for a broad audience, with “broad” being relative. Almost everyone is on Facebook. Even a pretty niche demographic is likely to have tens or even hundreds of thousands of people in it.
  - > “Inside the Buzz-Fueled Media Startups Battling for Your Attention”

1. A click-through is when a user clicks on a link to view the Web page to where it directs.

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## Twitter

### EXAMPLES

- ▶ **Clean Energy Coalition:** “Don’t forget A2 Green Home Tour this Sat 5/9 at noon-4pm. Educational opportunity for all! <http://ow.ly/LYDon>”
- ▶ **Efficiency Maine:** “How efficient is your home? Calculate your home’s energy efficiency with Efficiency Maine’s handy online tool: <http://ow.ly/Jxofo>”

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLATFORM

- ▶ Twitter is ephemeral, even by the standards of the Internet. The average lifespan of a tweet is between 20 seconds and a couple of hours. Only 6% of tweets are ever retweeted, and 97% of those retweets happen within the first hour.
  - > “[The Short Lifespan of a Tweet: Retweets Only Happen Within the First Hour](#)”
- ▶ Twitter is not particularly good at driving traffic to website content, but it is very good at starting conversations.
  - > “[The Unbearable Lightness of Tweeting](#)”
- ▶ Twitter needs lots of care and feeding. Tweets have to be spontaneous and frequent to work. Most programs should expect to devote at least an hour a day (and probably closer to 10 to 12 per week) to your social accounts, with most of that going to Twitter.
  - > “[Social Media Strategy: How Much Time Does a Good Strategy Really Take?](#)”

### HOW TO USE THIS PLATFORM WELL

- ▶ Post frequently and do not be afraid to repost the same content. Around 14 times per day is a decent rule of thumb.
  - > “[The Social Media Frequency Guide: How Often to Post to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and More](#)”
- ▶ Listen more than you broadcast.
  - > “[Create Your Twitter Content Strategy](#)”
- ▶ Pay attention to the ongoing conversations that are happening so that you will know when you have something to add.
  - > “[Flock to Unlock: A Unique Way to Drive Sales on Twitter](#)”
- ▶ Find the influential voices in your market and tweet them.
  - > “[16 Social Media Marketing Tips From the Pros](#)”
- ▶ Make sure you’re adding value to the conversation, not just shouting links at people.
  - > “[How to Build a Winning Twitter Strategy in 2014](#)”

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## LinkedIn

### EXAMPLES

- ▶ [Austin Energy](#): “Our Green Building team helped students from Austin Community College build this tiny house as part of our Budding Green Project. Now it’s for sale on Ebay! This is the type of hands-on education that helps build the next generation of green-minded individuals.”
- ▶ [Efficiency Nova Scotia](#): “Nova Scotians investment in energy efficiency this year will save us around \$180 million in electricity costs over the next decade. It’s one of the ways Nova Scotians are leading by example. Find out how much we could save if we invest.”

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLATFORM

- ▶ While it began life as a networking/job-hunting website, LinkedIn has grown to become a “professional Facebook.”
  - > [“The Platform Publisher Race is Heating Up and LinkedIn is Gaining”](#)
- ▶ The website is home to thousands of professional groups, many of which have ongoing conversations that will be relevant to your content.
  - > [“5 Spam-Free Steps To Use LinkedIn Groups in Your Content Marketing Strategy”](#)
- ▶ Because it is still geared toward professional networking, LinkedIn remains better suited for individuals than for brands.
  - > [“LinkedIn Company Page Vs Personal Profile: Which Is Better?”](#)
- ▶ LinkedIn users put a particular emphasis on thought leadership.
  - > [“How to Use LinkedIn to Build Your Thought Leadership”](#)

### HOW TO USE THIS PLATFORM WELL

- ▶ Get involved in professional groups. There are thousands of these, many on niche topics. Find relevant ones and participate regularly.
  - > [The Sophisticated Marketer’s Guide to LinkedIn](#)
- ▶ Get your whole team involved. LinkedIn still functions better for individuals than it does for brands. But your people are part of your brand. Encourage them to share your content, too.
  - > [“Why You Should Care About LinkedIn’s Content Marketing Score”](#)
- ▶ Curate content (much as you would with Facebook). That means pointing users to things that will be of interest to them (and that are still relevant to you), even if you did not write those things and those things are not directly about you.
  - > [The Sophisticated Marketer’s Guide to LinkedIn](#)
- ▶ Pay attention to metrics. LinkedIn provides you with a content marketing score. Use it to see what’s working and what isn’t.
  - > [“Why You Should Care About LinkedIn’s Content Marketing Score”](#)

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## Blogs (e.g., WordPress, Medium, Tumblr, Blogger)

### EXAMPLES

- ▶ American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy (ACEEE): [“Why Everyone Benefits From Energy Efficiency Programs”](#)
- ▶ Clean Energy Works: [“Tax Time: Stretch Your Efficiency Investment”](#)
- ▶ *Home Energy* magazine: [“Home Energy Joins New DOE Residential Network”](#)

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLATFORM

- ▶ While they are sometimes forgotten in all the hype over the next Facebook/Pinterest/Instagram, blogs (the original social networks) are still an important part of a content marketing strategy.
  - > [“Is Blogging Still Important?”](#)
- ▶ Blogs can be part of your own website or they can be hosted on an external blogging platform, such as WordPress.com, Medium, or Tumblr.
  - > [“What’s With New Blogging Platforms Like Medium? Should I Use One?”](#)
- ▶ External platforms can be better for getting content to people than driving them to a blog on your website.
  - > [“Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Medium?”](#)
- ▶ Self-hosted blogs are better for pulling people to your website and for improving your rankings on search engines.
  - > [“Is Blogging Still Important?”](#)

### HOW TO USE THIS PLATFORM WELL

- ▶ Be conversational—don’t use a lot of jargon, and talk to people, rather than at them.
  - > [“16 Tips From Blogging Editors for Beginners”](#)
- ▶ Keep things reasonably short. About 1,100 words should generally be your maximum. A really well-written post can go up to 1,700 words (about seven minutes of reading time). Shorter works perfectly well too, but you need at least 300 words to get your post indexed by search engines.
  - > [“What’ll Be the Best Length for a Blog Article in 2015 for Search Engine Optimization?”](#)
- ▶ Link out generously.
  - > [“So You’ve Created a Blog, Now What?”](#)
- ▶ Use search-friendly titles and headings. That means using phrases that people are actually searching for, even if those are not as technically precise. (Think “Obamacare” rather than “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.”)
  - > [“The Beginner’s Guide to Search Engine Optimization”](#)

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## Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat

### EXAMPLES (Pinterest Boards)

- ▶ Center for Energy and Environment: “Energy Saving Devices”
- ▶ ENERGY STAR®: “Don’t Be a Dim Bulb”
- ▶ EnergyFit Nevada: “Breathe Easy”
- ▶ *Home Energy* magazine: “Net Zero Homes”

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLATFORM

- ▶ Image-based social sharing websites are extremely popular but are not necessarily for everyone if you aren’t already creating images for your campaigns.
- ▶ Unless your campaign really lends itself well to images, these should not be your first choice for social media presence. (Start with Facebook, then add Twitter and LinkedIn.)
- ▶ While each of these websites is designed for sharing images, the demographics are quite different. For example:
  - > Approximately 71% of Pinterest users are women; only 13% of men who are online use Pinterest, while 42% of women who are online use the service.
    - ▶ “Pinterest: The No-Bro Zone”
  - > Instagram users are young; around 60% of its users are between the ages of 18 and 34.
    - ▶ “Infographic: Who’s Really Using Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Instagram in 2015? Social’s Biggest Network Isn’t Dying, But It Is Getting Grayer”
  - > Snapchat users are even younger: 71% of them are under the age of 25.

### HOW TO USE THIS PLATFORM WELL

- ▶ Images that include homeowners and community members might get the attention of these featured people, and even be shared by them. Just make sure you have their permission before posting photos.
- ▶ Share high-quality, interesting images (while important, insulation installation can be a visual turnoff).
- ▶ Use keywords and hyphens (versus underscores) in your image file names so search engines recognize the image name.
  - > “26 Ways to Make Pinterest Work for Your Business”

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## Wikipedia

### EXAMPLES

- ▶ ENERGY STAR
- ▶ New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)
- ▶ Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC)

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLATFORM

- ▶ Though not often thought of as a social network, Wikipedia is arguably the largest of all. It has become the go-to source for basic information.
- ▶ The entire website is user-generated—the content is added entirely by volunteers, and anyone can edit. It is a great place to add your research content (with links back to research).
- ▶ You cannot do direct marketing on Wikipedia. Wikipedia will mark articles whose content appears to look too much like marketing copy, and advocating for your own cause on Wikipedia violates the site’s [conflict of interest policy](#).
- ▶ Starting your own niche wiki is generally not recommended. Unless your interested community starts out quite large, it will be difficult to attract enough users to create a critical mass of content.

### HOW TO USE THIS PLATFORM WELL

- ▶ Search for your program on Wikipedia. If your program is already mentioned, you can contribute additional information to the article to build off of its popularity, rather than creating a new article.
  - > [“Use Wikipedia as a Marketing Tool”](#)
- ▶ Add your own research content as sources for articles, and discuss the results of that research in a neutral fashion, where relevant.
- ▶ Keep in mind the [1-9-90 rule](#). For most wikis, about 90 percent of your users will simply view content, another 9% will edit existing content, and just 1% will actively create new content.

## Niche and/or Special Interest Social Media Sites

### EXAMPLES

- ▶ Better Buildings Residential Network Group on Home Energy Pros

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLATFORM

- ▶ The world of social media isn’t limited to large, general-interest websites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. There are a lot of social networks built around specific topics. A few of particular interest:

- 
- > **Home Energy Pros:** This unique digital community was created by and for those who work in the home energy performance arena. Each member receives their own Web space on which to share their professional profile, blog, establish discussions, form topical groups, and post videos and pictures. The website also features a private online community created exclusively for [Residential Network members](#).
  - > **Nextdoor:** A social networking platform for neighborhoods. Groups established on Nextdoor are private (or at least semi-private) as the service limits posts for a particular neighborhood group to people from that neighborhood and other surrounding neighborhoods.
  - > **Ning:** A platform for creating social networks. Ning allows users to create communities based on specific interests and gives community creators control over the visual appearance, the feature set, and membership information/data within the communities.

## HOW TO USE THIS PLATFORM WELL

- ▶ Before investing resources into posting on a niche social website, determine whether or not your audience is already there. If your audience isn't already on a website, then consider if you have the resources to commit to growing a community from scratch.
- ▶ You might find, for example, a Nextdoor group that is already set up for your community. If so, you should check on:
  - > Group size
  - > Activity within the group
  - > Whether the group targets the same portion of the community you are targeting. For example, if the Nextdoor group is mostly retirees and your target audience is landlords, then you probably want to invest your time elsewhere.
- ▶ If you have a program that is offering rebates for various home energy upgrades, Home Energy Pros (where the audience is mostly contractors) might be an excellent venue, as you are communicating directly to an audience who may value your content.
- ▶ If you are planning to build your community from scratch, you should prepare to invest significant time and energy into doing so. Community building from scratch is a difficult process. [Organic growth rates](#) are only a few percentage points per month, so starting from zero means a long road before acquiring a meaningful community.
- ▶ On a forum or community-based site, the 1% rule is a good rule of thumb: For every one person contributing to a conversation, an additional 99% are simply reading the content. So, if your community has only 100 users, it's not unreasonable to expect that you might be the only person contributing content. In other words, until your website is quite large, don't expect many active discussions.

## HOW MUCH SHOULD I RELY ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Keep in mind that social media should not replace or be the sole focus of your program's marketing efforts, such as an informative website and targeted email campaigns. While social media excels at giving people a sense of what your organization is like (i.e., brand marketing), you will likely need to combine it with other outreach efforts to ensure a successful marketing plan for your program.

More information on social media, including examples of how other residential energy efficiency programs have used it, can be found in the [Better Buildings Residential Program Solution Center](#), an online collection of resources and lessons learned. The Solution Center helps residential energy efficiency programs and partners:

- ▶ Minimize trial and error to achieve success
- ▶ Plan, operate, and evaluate their programs
- ▶ Access a living repository of examples and resources

Additional social media resources include:

- ▶ Presentations:
  - > "Social Media Tools & Strategies"
  - > "Using Social Media to Engage the Community in Energy Efficiency Projects"
- ▶ Reports:
  - > *Overview of Marketing Methods for Local Retrofit Programs*
  - > *Social Norms and Social Networks*
- ▶ Residential Network Peer Exchange Call Summary:
  - > "Using Social Media for Long Term Branding"



The [Better Buildings Residential Network](#) connects energy efficiency programs and partners to share best practices and learn from one another to increase the number of homes that are energy efficient.

Members of the Residential Network join with fellow energy efficiency programs and partners to identify and address common challenges and market opportunities through voluntary initiatives.

Members are asked what tools and resources would help create more upgrades and satisfied consumers. Invitations are then sent out for a limited-time effort to develop a toolkit to address the needs identified, such as this toolkit concerning social media.

Contact us at [bbresidentialnetwork@ee.doe.gov](mailto:bbresidentialnetwork@ee.doe.gov) concerning this toolkit, sharing your social media efforts for recognition, for more information about participating in the next Voluntary Member Initiative, or to join the Better Buildings Residential Network.