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THE WAYS LAW ENFORCEMENT USES SOCIAL MEDIA TO FIGHT CRIME

Social media is being used more and more by law enforcement agencies, and not just to fight Internet-related crimes. We're talking about solving crimes that are happening on the street and in your

community. Law enforcement bodies try to state up-to-date and use alternative ways to prevent crimes. As social media became an integral part of people's lives below are five different ways law enforcement is utilizing social media and real-time search to enhance tactics, disseminate public information, and ultimately prevent criminal activity.

1. Police Blotter Blogs:

A police blotter is the record of events at a police station. Traditionally, a desk sergeant kept a register of these events. Nowadays, Twitter feeds, blogs, YouTube, and Facebook Fan Pages are being used by captains and chiefs to put out the digital equivalent of the police blotter in real-time.

Publishing a register of crimes and arrests in an area has been an online activity for a while now, especially through local newspaper websites. But social media is allowing many police officers on the scene to report the publicly available details of a crime for themselves. Reporters are getting their facts directly from a stream of real time-data and blog posts coming from the department. [1]

Individual cops aren't about to turn into citizen journalists anytime soon, but the police are able, through social media and realtime updates, to provide essential information that the public and news gathering agencies need to know.

2. The Digital "Wanted Poster":

In the vein of an Old West "Wanted" poster, displayed in the most trafficked area of town, modern-day law enforcement agencies are posting descriptions of criminals on today's most trafficked spots - namely the social web.

With millions of users, extraordinary reach, and the lightning- fast exchange of text, photos, and video, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are ideal for getting the word out about wanted persons with up-to-the-minute updates.

The Boynton Beach Police Department is a good example. On their Facebook Fan Page, the department put up a post with the headline, "Police need help identifying motorcyclist who robbed man at ATM." In the post there was a photo from the ATM machine of

the crime in progress. The department also cross-posted the information to their Twitter page. [4]

In the UK, the Leicestershire Constabulary is one of a number of police departments focusing on being hyper-local and involved with the community through social media. Their website has a section titled "Can you help?" which is formatted like a blog, and contains posts about ongoing criminal investigations, and a "Wanted Poster" and "Missing Persons" area with photos and requests for residents to respond with any leads they might have.

3. Anonymous E-Tipsters:

Tips from the community have been a time-honored way that citizens have worked with the public to fight crime.

Consulting companies are developing very sophisticated ways for the public and the police to interact online. The tip411 program developed by the Citizen Observer Corporation is marketed to law enforcement as a web-based notification toolset. Citizen participation has always been a big part of fighting crime, and the people at tip411 stress that social media “acts as a ‘force multiplier’ by empowering your community to get involved.”

The program allows tipsters to send information anonymously through a variety of means including “anonymous web chat, text tips and secure social media publishing.” Filtered alerts can then be pushed out through a police department's central location to other web mediums. Bundled with other offerings, tip411 can then be published with Google Maps to create a clickable, interactive crime “heat map” of sorts where others can click on links directly to add more information and tips based on location. This program is meant to encourage increased interaction between the police and the community through real-time web tools. [3]

4. Social Media Stakeout:

Social media advocates stress listening as a part of any brand's online marketing strategy. Listening to the bad guys doing bad things has always been a part of police work. It's important for police to search the real-time web to target particular keywords and phrases being passed around on social media. Use of social media monitoring has a strategic, tactical and operational application for law enforcement.

Boston Police Department Superintendent John Daly spoke about using Twitter search to monitor chatter around the Boston area in real-time. He's very sensitive to the implications of engaging in this type of search, as many police departments are. [2]

5. Thwarting Thugs in the Social Space:

Myspace, Facebook and Twitter are popular with gang members, and police use this to their advantage. Law enforcement has been able to infiltrate street gangs by posing as fellow gang members online, making connections, and intercepting criminal communications as they happen. Information like photos, videos, and friend links help law enforcement understand the dynamics of gangs when investigating their activities.

According to an article in 219 magazines, police in Cincinnati used Facebook and MySpace to follow more than 20 members of a local gang, the "Northside Taliband." The evidence they gathered helped law enforcement connect members to a multitude of crimes, including a possible homicide. Other agencies have employed these tactics as well. [2]

Law enforcement use of social media to aid in criminal investigations will continue to be an important tool in preventing crime and identifying evidence and individuals associated with criminal activity. The adoption of formal policies and processes within agencies will lead to a unified, consistent approach to modern technology usage. As personnel become even more familiar and comfortable using it, they will continue to find robust and comprehensive ways to incorporate emerging social media platforms into their daily routines, thus yielding additional success in interrupting criminal activity, closing cases and ultimately solving crimes. Based on the 24-hour availability of social media, some agencies' communications centers monitor the sites. Some departments assign the public information officer, and others give the responsibility to watch commanders. Department heads must assess their organizations to see where the program will fit best. Use of social media helps agencies engage members of the community who otherwise may not interact with law enforcement and, in turn, builds public trust and improves relationships with the public.

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