5. Using Social Media and Technology to Increase Access to Natural Areas

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People are always within three feet of their phones and they can be inspired through this familiar means to connect with and care for natural places both near and far.

— Heidi Clark, TravelStorysGPS

Social media and technology have transformed the way we interact with one another, and increasingly, how we interact with natural areas. We use social media to connect and plan with others, to share our experiences and thoughts, to advocate for our causes, and many others. These avenues of social media can be used purposefully to promote the use of natural areas. Indeed, they can promote use unintentionally as well. Supporting social media and a host of other innovations, technology enhances our outdoor experiences through better planning and preparation, faster and more thorough dissemination of information, and the customization of outdoor experiences. This section explores how some organizations and parks are using social media and technology to increase the number of users, expand user group demographics, and increase the use of the space overall. Relevant to this chapter, but ultimately not a focus is the work many organizations are doing surrounding social programming in natural areas. Social programming is critical to increasing access to natural areas, and social media and technology likely have a role in promoting and supporting social programming. This chapter, however, focuses on the technical and digital.

For the purposes of this section, social media is defined as an Internet website or application that carries “media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers” (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest are the most common forms of social media (Duggan, 2015). Technology is defined here as other websites and
applications that convey information in specialized ways or physical tools that are relevant to support being active outside. Smartphones, smartphone apps, personal blogs, and other websites are the most common forms of relevant technology, though a few other creative physical technologies are explored as well.

5.1 Smartphones

Smartphones and their ubiquity have changed the way we communicate, document and process information, interact with others, and spend time by ourselves. As of July 2014, 71.4% of all Americans older than 18 years of age possessed a smartphone, an important tool for the social media and technology discussed in this chapter (Nielsen 2014a). The full age, gender, and racial demographic breakdown along with an analysis of the activities for which we use our smartphones can be seen below.

Data from December 2013 showed that the average U.S. citizen uses their device 34 hours and 21 minutes a month, which has almost certainly increased since then and will continue to rise (Nielsen 2014b). Note that the activity “Social” is separated from “Comms” (communication), which is presumably talking to individuals. This suggests that in 2014 the average person spent nearly 600 minutes a month interacting on social media websites on their smartphones alone.
There is little doubt that smartphones have been integrated into our daily lives and habits. Fortunately, organizations looking to leverage or grow their networks already have a seed planted in most of our pockets.

5.2 The Importance of Social Media: Reaching Adults and Children

This section highlights the importance of including a social media presence for any organization that hopes to stay relevant and garner support from the general public. The following table presents results from a September 2014 Pew Research Center survey looking at social media use and preferences for American adults (ages 18+) (Duggan, 2015):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Among all American adults, the percentage who use the following social sites:</th>
<th>Among online American adults, the percentage who use the following social sites:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study also separates the data (specifically relating to internet users) through a variety of other demographic filters (gender, age, education, and salary). Surprising to note is the exceptionally high use of social media among 18-29 year olds (89%) and 30-49 year olds (82%). All other demographic populations were in the 70% range, except for older populations, which fell to 65% and 49%, for ages 50-64 and 65+, respectively.

The data confirms what our intuition tells us: Millennials (18-29 year olds) are leading the charge with Internet and social media use. By extension, we may presuppose that this active demographic no longer relies on newspapers, local periodicals, or billboard posts to learn what activities are available in an area. Scarce are the people who use a library or travel agent to organize the next trip to a national park and no longer are local community spaces required in order to communicate with a group of people. The phrase “word of mouth” no longer literally applies. The Internet and social media has simplified, and accelerated many of these transactions. It is now important for any park steward or outdoor organization seeking a public connection to have a presence online and, in particular, in social media.

Children are becoming online users in comparable numbers. In the United Kingdom, a recent study found that 59% of children have used a social network by the age of ten and the network most frequently used is Facebook (Williams 2014). This study, however, was conducted through the lens of online safety for children. Most social media websites (Face-
book, Instagram, Twitter, and others) require account holders to be at least 13 years old, albeit this is somewhat unenforceable. For YouTube, the age limit to own an account and upload videos is 18 though anyone can access posted videos.

While Internet safety is not likely be a concern for outdoor organizations using social media, it does suggest that social media may not be a useful outlet for engaging children younger than 13 years old. Also, it reminds us that the very nature of social media requires website moderators to be ever vigilant to make sure their message boards maintain an appropriate discourse. While social media can effectively engage Millennials, reaching children (13 years old or younger) through social media may be more successful with a campaign directed at families and parents.

5.3 Social Media Brings Us Outside, Together

Understanding the pervasiveness of social media is important, but understanding why and how people use social media can be particularly informative for outdoor organizations. People use social media to stay connected or become connected if they move to a new place. These people engage through sharing their experiences with family, friends and the general public. Social media creates the framework where people can meet, keep in touch with one another, and learn about upcoming events and news.

Understanding that social media is primarily people-centric makes it clear that park use is often a secondary consequence or even an ulterior motive by those organizations employing social media. This fact, however does not devalue the importance of social media for outdoor organizations. Indeed, social media is an important tool to support event and news communication and to coordinate event logistics.

More powerful than these tools may be social media’s ability to demonstrate access and encourage participation. Photographs and videos are a crucial aspect of a social media experience because they can connect imagination with reality allowing for viewers to place themselves in the location portrayed by the image. The art community and many others call images and videos “invitations” (Mapp 2015).

Seeing pictures of people with whom others can identify allows the viewer to place him or herself in the event or place. Furthermore, when people see pictures of themselves on these websites, it provides an “imbedded validation” (Mapp 2015). For those who normally do not identify with hiking or exploring, these invitations and validations are often what open up the door to the wilderness, however defined.
Outdoor Afro

As described in Section 3 earlier, Outdoor Afro, founded by Rue Mapp, self describes as a “community that reconnects African-Americans with natural spaces and one another through recreational activities...Outdoor Afro uses social media to create interest communities, events, and to partner with regional and national organizations that support diverse participation in the Great Outdoors.” The organization operates by having leaders (also known as organizers) post events through the social media websites Meetup or Facebook. These leaders are facilitators by being the stimulus for trips, plan most logistics, and monitor the group’s Meetup and Facebook pages.

There are 13 publicized Meetup groups on the Outdoor Afro website from San Francisco to Ohio to Washington D.C. The Meetup platform is becoming more ubiquitous and is ideal for promoting group activities, as there is easy functionality for members to participate in social media and modify and take ownership of their experience. For example, members can post pictures to each event. Mapp also maintains a presence on the other social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. She notes an age barrier between the different platforms. Generally speaking, Facebook reaches people 25 years and older and Twitter and Instagram around 15 to 25 years old.

For more information see: www.OutdoorAfro.com and www.meetup.com

Other organizations similar to Outdoor Afro are:
Latino Outdoors – www.LatinoOutdoors.org (see Section 3 above)

Social media is ever evolving as new apps reach the market place and as people find new ways to interact through smartphones and other devices. Some current best practices for organizations in using social media are presented at the end of this chapter in the appendix.

5.4 Technology Enhances Our Experience Outside

Some may call it emerging technologies, others call them “gadgets”, and still others may call them toys or something else altogether. Technology is changing the landscape of how people experience the outdoors. It is hard to say whether the technology is outpacing the demand or the demand driving the technology, but the horizon is becoming clearer — people are increasingly reliant on digital technologies to learn about, plan, and experience their adventures. Parks, land trusts, and other organizations have a growing ability to ease logistical hurdles and enhance our experience outside.

Planning and Mapping

The first step in going outside is deciding to go outside. The second and third steps are choosing where to go and what to do when you are there. In an age where all other ques-
tions are answered with a click of a mouse or smartphone, outdoor organizations should expect the public to seek answers to their outdoor adventure questions in a similar fashion. While some Park Rangers and Outward Bound instructors may quiver at the idea of people going for a hike with just the information on their phone, this is a reality that a few well-intentioned app developers are facilitating.

**Chimani: Apps for the Outdoors**

This app functions as an all in one digital guidebook, trail map, and park pamphlet. Each individualized park app includes varied information: bus schedules, time of Ranger talks, campground notes, wildlife information, points of interest and relevant information, and much more.

Started in 2010, by Kerry Gallivan, Chimani, LLC has so far created these slick apps for 16 parks and national monuments from Acadia to Zion. Reflecting the reality of poor service where this app is most useful, Chimani’s apps are large files that include all maps, photographs, and text to be used without signal. These apps can be downloaded on your smartphone for free. As of April 2015, Chimani has been downloaded 674,000 times and has 130,000 active users (used the App within the previous calendar year).

Future developments regarding Chimani will be the addition of more park specific Apps and to “gamify” the experience. Through the phone’s geolocation ability, users will earn points and earn unique badges for spending time outdoors, reaching certain landmarks, and accomplishing feats such as seeing the sunrise on Cadillac Mountain (Acadia National Park) on January 1st. These badges ensure that users be present in natural areas while using technology. See Section 5.4 for more information on the gamification of natural areas.

For more information see: [http://www.chimani.com](http://www.chimani.com)

Other organizations similar to Chimani are:

- Yonder – [http://www.yonder.it/](http://www.yonder.it/)
- AllTrails – [alltrails.com](http://www.alltrails.com)
- TrailLink (Rails to Trails Conservancy) – [www.TrailLink.com](http://www.TrailLink.com)

Not surprisingly, some of the larger parks with big budgets are designing their own apps as well. For example, Grand Teton National Park will be rolling out their Places app in 2016 which has the ability to sync with the park website. Grand Teton National Park Chief Interpreter Vickie Mates says, “The app will function as a portable information center where people can get updates, park news, and any park alerts right on their smartphone.” One of the many novel functions of this app includes augmented reality where a viewer can point his or her phone towards a scene and see what the park may have looked like with glaciers 10,000 ago.

While it may make sense for many parks and land trusts to have their own app, Facebook
page, and Twitter handle, this ever-increasing number of unique apps/social media outlets creates a space for others to bundle this information in one clearinghouse.

CaliParks

Launched in February 2015, www.CaliParks.org serves as a clearinghouse for the nearly 12,000 national, state, and city parks in California. The website was conceptualized by Jon Christensen and created by Stamen, a San Francisco tech company with expertise in data visualization. The idea started with the desire to display social media produced within the physical boundaries of each park in order to show “how people feel about their open spaces” and to creatively display “evidence for the argument that access to open space must be protected” (Rodenberg 2014).

The final website gathered social media of 500,000 unique users and consolidated these photos (Flickr and Pintrest), “tweets” (Twitter), and “tips” (Foursquare) to advertise each parks. The simple website offers a search function to find your nearest park, how to get there, what activities you can do when you arrive, and the pictures and sentiments of the previous visitors who used social media in the park. A link to the park’s native website is included if available. The project was supported by the Parks Forward Commission and the Resources Legacy Fund and more work is being done to make the website an app for easier smartphone use.

With respect to the technology market place, Stamen recognizes the danger in duplication and future competition to their websites and apps. CaliParks is itself an upgrade from the Android-only California State Parks app, CalParks, which houses information of just the 279 state parks. Visit the CA Department of Parks and Recreation website to compare with CaliParks.

For more information see: http://www.caliparks.org/

Parks Forward Commission: http://www.parksforward.com/

In producing the CaliParks website, the creators stated two realizations. First, parks are a social place where people will gather with or without support from park agencies. Second, diverse user groups are using parks, despite the underrepresentation of some groups (Christensen and Gold 2015). These creators are in agreement with many other park advocates that social media serve as an important invitation to diverse user groups. Summed up, “People want to see people like themselves in public spaces in order to feel welcome there. And if we can represent that diversity by sharing those images, it is an invitation to California’s parks” (Christensen and Gold 2015).

These invitations may not have explicit RSVPs, but it appears feasible that in the creation of CaliParks new metrics for park use were explored. In compiling the photographs and text produced in a California park, creators Christensen and Gold added a technological
component to calculating park use, a term difficult quantify in many natural areas with free and open access. (See Chapter 3 of the Proceedings to the 2014 Berkley Workshop for a discussion on measuring park use.)

Another important media outlet is more formal blogs, reminiscent of magazine or news articles. These writers can serve as “power referrers” because they combine the influence of a dedicated readership with something like the rapport of a friend. Bloggers portray a user or consumer opinion which is valued above other information sources (Schmallegger 2007). Not to mention that the reach of each blog is extended through each reader’s click of the “share” button—this validates the information not only by the increasing the number of shares and views, but also can influence readership depending on who shares the article.

**American Latino Expedition (ALEx)**

Beginning in 2013, the American Latino Heritage Fund and the National Park Foundation funded the first American Latino Expedition (ALEx). The expedition is a week-long event that brings a handful of bloggers from the Latino community to a different national park each year.

The bloggers, more specifically called “dedicated bloggers, dynamic social media personalities, and overall influencers,” travel throughout the park together and communicate their adventures to their respective blog following. The members of each mission covered a wide range of interests: culinary, lifestyle, art and photography, popular culture and more. This broad range allowed the team of eight or so writers to reach a large audience in the Latino community and beyond.

In 2014, ALEX traveled to Grand Teton National Park and was sponsored by Go RVing, Aramark, REI, and Columbia Sportswear. In a report to the sponsors, the following statistics were gathered. (Note: according to Twitter, one “impression” is each time a user is served a Tweet in his or her “Timeline” or “Search Results.”)

- 23 blog posts to the American Latino Heritage Fund’s website and 18 posts to the individual blogs of the expedition participants.
- 29.5M impressions generated and 2.1M unique individuals reached using hashtag #ALEx14 on Twitter from September 7 – October 15.
- 12.9M impressions generated and 5.9K unique individuals reached using hashtag #LatismGoParks on Twitter from October 8 – October 12.
- 700K people reached using hashtag #ALEx14 on the National Park Foundation Facebook page.
- 21.5K people reached using hashtag #ALEx14 on the American Latino Heritage Fund Facebook page.
- 334 posts on Instagram using hashtag #ALEx14.
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• 15K unique visitors to the American Latino Heritage Fund’s website from June 1 to October 31.

Note: As of this writing, there is no information on the website regarding the 2015 expedition.

For more information see: http://www.alhf.org/alex

Learning, Context, and Content

Guidebooks, historical societies, and even non-fiction stories indulge our desires to learn about the places in which we find ourselves. A sign at an overlook may describe the significance of the valley below or a placard on a courthouse wall describes the famous lawyers who litigated inside. This information is not likely what brought the traveler out to explore—certainly this person could learn much about a location without being present. Yet, the combination of information and place enhances both the learning experience and the visual experience. Technology is becoming more creative to build context for our daily adventures and convey content in interesting ways. These innovations have the ability to draw in more people to the natural landscapes around them and spark an interest that may lay dormant.

TravelStorysGPS

TravelStorysGPS is a mission-driven mobile app development company that provides the technical and creative expertise to create location-based audio tours. The clients, or “sponsors,” of TravelStorysGPS are organizations looking to improve content and/or how that content is disseminated to visitors. For example, Grand Teton National Park Foundation created an audio tour presenting stories while driving along the Teton Road through the inner loop of the national park. All of the audio stories are “GPS-triggered,” meaning users automatically hear about site-specific stories as they pass by certain locations. Users can also access stories remotely and view a virtual exhibit hall of images, text, videos and links. The geolocation feature and the mission-driven local authorship (tours are created by the organization themselves rather than by some outside publisher or author) are the two mainstays of TravelStorysGPS. Indeed, many of the stories have a particularly authentic air as they are told by local residents, or by the subject of the story themselves. The app also provides the framework to create partnerships throughout the community. Not only can organizations partner to create tours that integrate more than one site, but also sponsor organizations can harness the power of marketing for other local businesses. For example, “App for an App” is a marketing tool that partners sponsors and restaurants—visitors show they have learned of the restaurant from their tour and receive a free appetizer in return.
The general public can download this app from iTunes or Google play for free and can access any tour hosted on the platform. For more information see: http://www.travelstorysgps.com/

Other applications that are similar to TravelStorysGPS are:

- Detour (Walking tours of San Francisco, CA and Austin, TX) – www.detour.com
- Field Trip (A generalized version for an entire city with less audio) – www.fieldtripper.com

The power behind this technology is its ability to communicate information, tell a story, and draw a listener or viewer into the moment. Effective apps like these can improve the value of an experience, and hopefully, will encourage further exploring.

It should be noted however, that these types of apps are somewhat “consumable.” That is to say, one would not likely return to a location in Grand Teton National Park to listen to a story they have already heard. In order to combat this issue, TravelStorysGPS and other similar apps strive to frequently add content. Even so, one is not likely going to travel to Grand Teton National Park just to listen to one of these stories or use a similar app. Essentially, these apps offer one more alternative for recreation in natural areas and, perhaps, offer a way to engage a more technologically reliant and younger demographic.

Another type of app that helps engage a young, technologically savvy demographic are the suite of identification apps available. These digital guides can satisfy any interest: wildlife, bird, plant, geology, and more.

### Identification Apps

Many field identification guidebooks are making their paper versions app friendly. Perhaps most famous are the bird apps – Audubon, Sibley, Peterson, National Geographic, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology (Merlin Bird ID) all have their own apps.

The major advantage is that the apps have more engaging functionality than their paper cousins. Some have interactive questions that help narrow down the species in question. Many have birdcalls. All of them have a greater variety of photographs to aid in field identification. Other advantages are that the average hiker is also less likely to leave his or her phone behind than the guidebook and, with much less forethought, can purchase and access the guide wherever there is a WiFi signal or cell phone service.

For more information see: http://leafsnap.com and www.inaturalist.org

### Citizen Science

Citizen science is touted as an important tool to get people more involved in the environment around them. People who are given responsibility or are given a platform to be a part...
of something large will likely take ownership over their community’s natural spaces. With this ownership likely come stewardship and perhaps, a few science publications (Conrad and Hilchey 2011).

**RASCals – Los Angeles Museum of Natural History**

The goal of the Reptiles and Amphibians of Southern California (RASCals) citizen science project is to improve the body of knowledge for native and non-native reptiles and amphibians in southern California. Any person with a smartphone can participate by taking pictures of the critter and submitting it to the museum for identification. The location of the photograph is recorded and added to the database. In order to submit the pictures, the participants must be a user of the app iNaturalist, a fun online community for sharing in the find.

For more information see:

http://www.nhm.org/site/activities-programs/citizen-science/rascals/about

Similar app/website to RASCals:

Project Noah: http://www.projectnoah.org/

Yale Sustainability - Citizen Science:

http://sustainability.yale.edu/research-education/citizen-science

The landscape of each of these digital technologies is far from certain. While large parks are devoting resources to develop their own digital information packets, smaller organizations with less staff may not prioritize these technologies. More than three-quarters of Americans (over 18 years old) say they use their smartphone for information about their location (Zickur 2013) and digital location-base-services are expected to rise by 400% by 2019 (ABI Research 2014). Some sort of app or innovation will likely fill the space if not these.

It is worth noting that smaller organizations with may be able to team up with app developers and larger organizations to include land trust parcels or city parks on emerging technologies. Indeed, it is quite possible that many parks and parcels are present on websites or apps without the knowledge of their respective caretakers. It may behoove these caretakers to have digital information (digital maps, park information, and transportation, for example) ready to send or link to should an opportunity arise.

**5.5 The Gamification of Natural Areas**

Some define “gamification” as “the process of game-thinking and game mechanics in non-game contexts to engage users in solving problems and increase users’ self-contributions” (Zichermann and Cunningham 2011, and Deterding and Others 2011). Games or structured, semi-competitive activities may entice people to natural areas who otherwise might not ven-
ture outside. People who need an incentive to participate more regularly in outdoor activities benefit from these events as well. These games and activities take place in the wild places near and far from our cities, the local parks in our neighborhoods, and throughout our cityscapes. The impetuses for these activities include adventure seekers—explorers (Geocaching) and public health advocacy (Beat the Streets).

**Groundspeak – “Location Based Adventure”**

Started in 2000, Groundspeak is the company that supports geocaching, the adventure activity where boxes are hid in various places with known GPS coordinates. The company boasts more than 2 million geocaches in more than 185 countries in a community of more than 6 million geocachers.

This company has leveraged their technological infrastructure to create CITO (Cache In Trash Out) and many other events. To increase the game experience, people can earn points by uncovering caches and attending events. These points are recorded and people can achieve certain statuses and compete against friends.

For more information see:

http://www.groundspeak.com/
https://www.geocaching.com
http://www.wherigo.com/

Other organizations similar to Groundspeak are:

Waymarking – www.Waymarking.com

**Beat the Streets – Public Health in Thurrock, England**

In an effort to increase the walking habits of a community and improve public health, more than 100 “Beat Boxes” were set up around the city. Players used tap cards, similar to some public transit cards, to record their presence at different destinations they traveled throughout the day. Each tap earned points based on the distance traveled in a given day and participants could track their scores online. After a two-month competition, those with the most points were given awards. It may be worth noting that events were promoted through newspapers, other periodicals, schools, as well Facebook, Twitter, and a dedicated website.

A few major results are:

- 22% said they were doing no physical activity at the start of the competition. By the end, this had reduced to 9% and in a survey two months after the end of the competition the figure was 3%.
5.6 Conclusion

Social media and technology are fundamentally changing the ways people interact with each other and conduct themselves everyday. While more and more people become connected through social media and rely on technology for their everyday lives, it may be a false assumption to believe that all people will benefit from an increased social media and technology presence in organizations that serve natural areas and in the natural areas themselves. Indeed, based on the conversations and research conducted to write this chapter, the outdoor community disagrees with what the future of social media is and, even more vociferously, with what the future of technology ought to be with respect to natural areas.

That said, land trusts and other organizations can leverage the ubiquity of smartphones, social media and other technologies to make local parks and natural spaces more inviting. Importantly, for the future of the conservation movement and outdoor organizations, young adults and teenagers are most apt to already be involved in social media and more likely to pursue the technologies that are being developed. These technologies can support logistics, improve experiences, and give incentives for more trips to natural areas. Various technological tools are becoming more available and can be used to involve both adults and children alike. Also, this new technology and social media may offer additional data points for new metrics that can be developed to measure park use and user engagement.

Questions to Consider

- How many people rely on social media to be involved in park use? Is it a deal breaker?
- What is the role for technology with children’s experiences in the outdoors?
- Does social media and technology detract from park use? And if so, how can this effect be mediated while still using social media and technology?
- What is the academic research necessary to further our knowledge with how social media and technology affects our relationship with natural areas?

Some of the Organizations Doing Interesting Work on this Topic

California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) – The California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) and the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) created CalEnviroScreen, a geographic information system (GIS) based tool that shows areas in California that are disproportionately burdened by multiple sources.
of pollution. While “green space” is not currently a factor in this tool (and some organizations are lobbying to include it), citing locations for parks can be enhanced using this tool. See: http://oehha.ca.gov/ej/ces2.html.

**U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) –** In the Chesapeake Bay, NOAA and the National Park Service (NPS) collaborated to create the Smart Buoys app. Smart Buoys is the interface for the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System (CBIBS) combining real time data on weather, water conditions, and water quality with information for the Capitan John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Each buoy serves as the location of an interpretive trail sign that can be accessed through the app. See: http://buoybay.noaa.gov/ and Smart Buoys in the App Store.

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) –** Similar to CalEPA’s CalEnviroScreen, the U.S. EPA developed a tool called EJSCREEN. This mapping tool is meant to help the EPA satisfy its charge to protect the environment and public health. Users can draw a polygon anywhere in the United States and receive a graphical breakdown of 12 different environmental justice indices and environmental indicators (for example, relative exposure to ozone, lead paint, and permitted water discharger) and seven different demographic indicators (for example, percent minority, low income, and age). See: http://www2.epa.gov/ejscreen

**Walk Score** – serves primarily as a website for apartment and house seekers to determine “walkability” for errands. One of the determinants included is proximity to parks. Users can type in their address and learn about the neighborhood and select local parks. See: https://www.walkscore.com/

**Works Cited/Useful Readings**


Personal Conversations

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• Gallivan, Kerry, Founder and CEO of Chimani, LLC, phone conversation with author, April 21, 2015.

• Lethbridge, Amy, Deputy Executive Officer at Mountains Recreation and Authority, phone conversation with author, March 19, 2015.
• Mapp, Rue, Founder and CEO of Outdoor Afro, in-person conversation with author, February 6, 2015.


Appendix 2: Tips for Effective Social Media Use

A Google search of “tips for social media marketing” will leave you with innumerable articles and blogs to filter through. The following list of six tips is a consolidation of many of the themes presented in some of these websites and an academic paper focused this topic.

1. Share at the best times (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10)

Several articles discussed testing different times and using analytics (see #3) to see which times are reaching the most viewers. Others mentioned that the same information could be shared throughout the day with a different headline. Posting at regular intervals (for example, 10am and 4pm each day) can build confidence in and reach different viewers. Having a schedule can make it easier on your organization to stay on task as well.

2. Use the right platform (3, 4, 6, 7, 9)

Facebook? Instagram? Twitter? MeetUp? Using the right platform can help you reach a larger and more appropriate audience. Experts generally suggest going “deeper” with fewer platforms than “broader” posting less regularly on more platforms, but consider your goals for social media before you adhere to any “rule”.

3. Use data analytics (1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10)

Most social media platforms offer analytics so that you can see how many people are interacting with your content, sharing it to their own networks, and more. This data can be a useful tool identifying successful content and style and the interests of your viewers. Some experts suggest experimenting with your grammar (short versus long and formal versus informal) and order of content (pictures, text, links) in your post.

4. Include pictures and videos in your posts (2, 3, 4, 7)

People are generally more attracted to posts with images and short video clips. Posts with pictures/videos garner more engagement and are shared more than posts without. Experts suggest that embedding a message or headline in a photo can boost messaging.

5. Balance sharing content and creating your own (2, 5, 7)

Several writers discuss a “4-1-1” rule of thumb for social media content. This rule suggests four posts of sharing other content (i.e. a post from a relevant partner), one post sharing your own content (i.e. a photo from a recent event), and one post advertising/selling/fundraising. This can help balance your status as an organization that influences and informs and as an organization that is self-serving.

6. Listen to and engage your audience (2, 4, 5, 6, 7)

Social media can and should be viewed as an on-going conversation, not a unidirectional voice. Simple games like voting for picture of the day/week/month can be good ways to engage and build a following. Solicit information from your viewers to build a conversation. For example, ask “What is your (favorite trail, time of day to visit, season)?”
Sources:


