



On Aug. 27, Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and chief executive officer of Facebook, announced that for the first time, 1 billion people around the world had used his social media website in one single day.

Chances are good that that figure included you, many of your fellow NALC members, your family members and your friends.

“Letter carriers are in the communications business,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “We may deliver millions of letters, postcards and packages to every address in the U.S. at least six days a week, but we also realize that the Postal Service is among the many channels of communication that are available in the Internet Age.”

Communications methods evolve, Rolando said, and as they do, letter carriers can literally use their fingertips to tap into a wealth of opportunities to embrace and use new formats and platforms to spread NALC’s message.

“Social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter to name just two, have seen explosive growth in influence and reach,” Rolando said, “so it makes good sense for the NALC to take an active role in using them.”

social studies

When the World Wide Web’s popularity skyrocketed in the early 1990s, websites were not particularly interactive. If motivated web users wanted to share information with other like-minded individuals or with specialized audiences, they had to turn to online message boards or virtual chat rooms to do that.

Then along came blogs—the term comes from the words “web” and “logs”—granting a measure of interactivity to web content. A blogger could post an article on a given topic, and any resulting engagement in that post’s comments section could serve as a means for the author and reader to exchange insights, ideas and criticisms.

Myspace emerged in 2003 as perhaps one of the splashiest forays into combining content, ideas, comments and chat together on one web page. Although they were quite popular for a while, the fully customizable websites of Myspace often had a reputation for being messy and disorganized.

Making social media work for letter carriers

A look at how @NALC_National has embraced #SocialMedia to help spread the union's message

Facebook was launched a year after Myspace. With Facebook's cleaner interface and more predictable format seeming to resonate better with a wide variety of web users, its popularity grew rapidly.

Websites are still crucial as reliable repositories for information, but the value of pages on a social media website lies in how they actively present information of interest.

"Facebook is a good substitute for creating a website," said **Scott Van Derven**, a member of Milwaukee Branch 2 and president of the Wisconsin State Association. "With Facebook, you can be a little more in touch—share photos and see what's going on."

Facebook is especially good for reaching out to younger letter carriers, Van Derven said. "My own kids thought I was crazy," he said with a laugh, "but now, 'the old man' is on top of this stuff."

Upland, CA Branch 2168's **Paula Miller** also believes that the hiring of the generally younger city carrier assistants will inspire greater numbers of letter carriers of all ages to become more skilled in social media.

"While working for the Region 1 NBA's office for our national 'Stamp Out Hunger' Food Drive," Miller said, "I found Facebook an amazing way to enhance our advertising to those we may not have touched otherwise.

"It was also helpful in getting a message out to many of our food drive coordinators," she said, "letting them know about upcoming events and/or posting pictures of past events."

Going #viral

The ability to share posted items is a key social media strength, and many of Miller's food drive pictures were immediately shared by her friends. "They, in turn, reached out to another large group of people by sharing it with their friends, and so on," she said.

Philadelphia Branch 157 member and Congressional District Liaison **Ed Morgan** found that the greatest number of social shares often result from picking a few really good pictures for posting—maybe just the best one or two. "Don't put too many up at once," Morgan said. "Be unique and be creative.



Paula Miles Miller
May 7, 2014 · 🌐

Share

👍 Margie Baria, Judy Robison Willoughby, Keisha Lewis and 8 others like this.

A Facebook post by Paula Miller of Upland, CA Branch 2168

“I love social media,” he said, “especially using it for letter carrier issues.”

Morgan is also a strong supporter of Twitter, the so-called “micro-blogging” website where users share brief messages containing no more than 140 characters. Twitter came online in 2006; it boasts more than 300 million active users.

Van Derven also likes Twitter “quite a bit,” he said, “especially for breaking news.

“I have a bunch of friends on Twitter across the nation,” he said, “and we use it to talk about work issues.” A recent discussion topic, he said, centered on an ongoing issue where postal vehicles were frequently catching fire. (See Director of Safety and Health Manuel Peralta Jr.’s column in the June *Postal Record*.)

Even though Twitter has a seemingly restrictive character limitation, you can still accomplish a lot with it, as Morgan demonstrated last summer. Users are able to attach photos and videos to “tweets,” and in the weeks leading up to the 2014 NALC Convention in Philadelphia, Morgan posted on his branch’s official Twitter account a series of clever photographs that featured a “Save America’s Postal Service” poster prominently placed next to a number of the city’s most famous landmarks.

Photos, Morgan observed, tend to get shared more, sometimes so far and wide that that they “go viral.”

“The best camera is the one in your pocket,” he said, referring to the one embedded in the almost-ubiquitous smartphones. “Whenever our branch is doing something, we use our phones to get the message out immediately.”

In Miller’s experience, pictures seem especially important to grab people’s attention to social media posts.

“My husband volunteers for the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, taking pictures all over the department for their Sheriff’s Information Bureau,” she said. “They use them for recruiting and image enhancement, and they have found that when they attach an interesting picture to a post, their ‘likes’ on the post increase dramatically.”

With its smaller user base, Twitter is for the “true believers,” Van Derven said, noting that almost all politicians use Twitter.

“Our congressmen and senators love seeing pictures of themselves meeting with constituents,” Morgan said.

“Social media has really worked well for us,” Van Derven said, “but there is an art to it.” He encourages branch leaders who are interested in getting started using Facebook or Twitter to put their official site addresses everywhere—in newsletters, on websites and so on. “Cross-promote what you do,” he said. “We want to make sure we’re as inclusive as possible.”

Morgan suggests that each branch have a single point of contact or get approval from branch leaders—just as the *NALC Constitution* mandates that a branch scribe must be approved by the branch’s president before he or she can have articles published in *The Postal Record*’s “Branch Items” section.

If that’s not possible for some reason, or if a letter carrier feels particularly compelled to post things on social media channels, “You should be clear that you’re speaking for yourself,” Morgan said. Think about what you’re posting, he said, and look to the more experienced carriers for some guidance.

Whatever you post online, Morgan advised, “Make sure it’s positive

toward letter carriers, not negative toward the Postal Service.”

Tips and strategies

Sharing NALC’s Facebook posts with your own friends and retweeting our tweets on Twitter are both highly effective ways for helping your union get its message out. And whether you’re taking advantage of these tremendous resources by sharing what we post, or if you’re tackling them on your own, NALC’s Communications and Media Relations Department has put together some advice for using social media to spread the letter carrier message.

First, it’s probably best to restrict *all* of your social media interactions to your own time—when you’re off the clock and out of uniform.

If you’re just getting started using social media, you should learn to crawl before you try to run. Check out how other people use Facebook, Twitter or any other social media site, to get “the lay of the land,” so to speak, and to learn the etiquette and basics for posting and sharing things online.

Another good rule of thumb is, “Don’t feed the trolls.” Trolls are online bullies who post messages that are clearly designed to inflame others or to derail a conversation. Ignore them; no one ever changed someone’s mind with a Facebook comment.

NALC’s official Facebook page is designed to be a friendly online place to publicize a variety of topics, such as the union’s work to protect the pay, benefits and working conditions of all letter carriers; keeping members up to date about our work to advance the collective-bargaining rights of all workers; and informing members (and

A tweet by
Sen. Heidi
Heitkamp
(D-ND)



Sen. Heidi Heitkamp @SenatorHeitkamp May 6
Met w/ @NALC_National 2 discuss how I'll cont. 2 stand up 4 postal employees thru leadership position on HSGAC subcmte

the public at large) about our many charitable efforts.

Comments to NALC's Facebook posts should remain on topic. The comments section is a lightly moderated public forum, not a place for users to address individual grievances. Members should take up any such concerns with their shop stewards and branch leaders through the proper channels. Comments that contain profanity, personal attacks or off-topic or libelous statements may be deleted, and posters who violate this policy may be removed.

But if you simply can't resist the urge to somehow respond—either on NALC's pages or your own—do your best not to sink to the troll's level by making your reply personal. One way to do this is to simply and calmly state your facts, and then move on. Otherwise, you could wind up wasting time and effort getting into a useless online conversation. Chances are you have better things to do with your time.

Many of these same rules apply to Twitter, a platform that the broadcast media loves. You've no doubt seen numerous news programs running tweets in a crawling ticker across the bottom of your TV screen, and most shows display a recommended hashtag for you to use when commenting online about the show or its topic.

Twitter does have the 140-character limit, but even the longest web addresses are automatically shortened by Twitter so as to not take up too much space. And some of the most effective tweets will have a little bit of everything: a short comment, a link and, if there's room, an attached photo or video.

Be wary of news stories or other items along the lines of "here's what

Social lexicon

These words might not mean what you think they mean, so here's a quick primer on some basic social media terms:

Block: How you can prevent someone from connecting with you.

Favorite: On Twitter, how a user shows simple approval of a tweet. (See "Like.")

Friend: (noun) someone with whom you are connected on your personal Facebook page, whether that's a family member, an acquaintance, or someone you actually consider a friend; (verb) the act of becoming connected with someone on Facebook.

Follower: Someone who is connected to you via social media. On Facebook, a follower is someone who "likes" the Facebook page of a business, a cause or a celebrity (as opposed to a "friend" on a personal page); on Twitter, a follower is anyone who has elected to see all of your tweets.

Handle: Another word for your account name on Twitter.

Hashtag: More prevalent on Twitter than on Facebook, a hashtag is a word or term preceded by # that can link your post to a particular topic.

Like: On Facebook, how a user shows simple approval of a post. (See "Favorite.")

Meme: Some form of media (usually a famous image containing overprinted humorous or ironic text) with a similar theme that gets shared frequently.

Quote: On Twitter, you quote a retweet if you want to add a comment to it before sharing it.

Retweet: On Twitter, you retweet to share on your own timeline someone else's tweet.

Share: On Facebook, sharing is the specific term for how a user spreads someone else's post so that his or her own friends (as determined by that user's privacy settings) can see it.

Tag: On Facebook or Twitter, you "tag" another account in one of your posts mainly so that account will receive a notification that you have done so, usually by putting @ before that account's name.

Unfriend: Disconnecting your personal Facebook page from someone else's.

Viral: A post on any social media platform is described as "viral" if it becomes wildly popular and spreads rapidly through repeated shares and retweets.



A tweet by Scott Van Derven of Milwaukee Branch 2

mailmanscott @mailmanscott · Jul 14
 @drew4130 @PostmanPat04 @mailman_eddie @GregInSunValley @cheriboop @Mailman.James518
 @greg_wisc 3 fires in 3 wks in WI

Connect with NALC

Facebook:
facebook.com/nalc.national

Twitter:
twitter.com/nalc_national

Instagram:
instagram.com/lettercarriers

Youtube:
youtube.com/ThePostalRecord

Vine:
 Letter Carriers

Periscope:
 @NALC_National

RSS (Rich Site Summary):
nalc.org/rss

people are saying online.” Facebook has more than 1 billion active users; Twitter, more than 300 million. In pools that large, it’s easy for someone to find opinions posted online in support of, or against, a given opinion, and rarely do such opinions come from thoroughly versed subject-matter experts. Consider the source.

A social media account is essentially the same thing as a newsletter or a website, so most of the basic rules governing such publications apply to the online realm as well. Regular updates and steady publicity can help drive visitors to your accounts and make them worth the effort.

Evolving @itudes

“Letter carriers are a reflection of the communities we serve and of the broader world in which we live,” President Rolando said. “And just like our customers, we get our news and information in a variety of ways: newspapers, TV, radio, websites, smart-phones—you name it.

“NALC has always recognized how the evolution of communications—and sometimes the revolutions—can be advantageous for us,” he said. “When the telegraph and telephone came along, letter carriers adapted to these new technologies and used them to our advantage. Postal critics said that the fax machine was supposed to be the death knell for

mail delivery, yet our own President Vincent Sombrotto had one installed in his office.

“Even now,” Rolando said, “the so-called ‘conventional wisdom,’ which gets trotted out in countless news articles and opinion pieces, is that websites and e-mail have removed the need for letter carriers. Yet here we are: 200,000-strong and as vital as ever, delivering mail and packages—not to mention groceries and bottled water—all ordered over the very Internet that is supposed to be signaling our demise.”

NALC continues to adapt to meet the information needs of its members, he said, not only because we can, but also because we must.

“Our jobs require daily personal contact with countless people,” Rolando said, “and there will never be a substitute for that. But in a world where we can type messages into small handheld devices, and have them instantly connect with a national and even worldwide audience, why wouldn’t we want to take full advantage of such a marvelous platform?”

“So we will continue to encourage each other to stay in touch, both physically and virtually,” he said. “We’ll keep using this country’s only universal delivery network as a means of communication, even as we use every tool at our disposal—such as our website and social media channels—as well.” **PR**