



Branches stay connected with social media

At this time in NALC's history, it has become increasingly crucial for branches to communicate with their members as quickly and effectively as possible. Many branches have found that social media is one of the best tools for connecting to a greater share of their membership. These branches are using platforms like Twitter and Facebook to update members with the latest news from NALC Headquarters, explain complex new safety guidelines, rally letter carriers behind pending legislation (including the current need for federal funding to offset the loss of Postal Service revenue stemming from the pandemic-caused economic shutdown) and highlight the extraordinary work done by our brothers and sisters in communities throughout the country.

For branch officers or members who are considering starting a social media page, NALC members who run their branch's social media pages have some pointers. Their methods and advice demonstrate how to use these platforms as effective tools for communication, including how to set the tone and guide the message for your branch's online presence.

Having a goal for your social media page helps keep it unified and on message. That is why, when Northeastern New York Branch 358 member **Billy Ganey** set up the branch's Facebook page in 2015, he made a resolution for the page. "My goal was to promote positive, factual stories," he said. Ganey wanted to steer clear of the negative tone that characterizes much of social media, and focus on positive events for letter carriers while keeping the members up to date with information.

Information distribution also is an important goal for New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member **Joseph Otero**, who serves as the social media editor for his branch. "Knowledge is power," Otero said. "The more information we get out to [our members], the more educated they are against any problem that comes up with management." The Branch 38 Facebook page also tries to focus on the positive. "We try to post more good news if possible," Otero added.

However, goals can be changed if necessary. When Central California Branch 231 member **Gary Bottom** started working as an administrator for his branch's Facebook page, he had

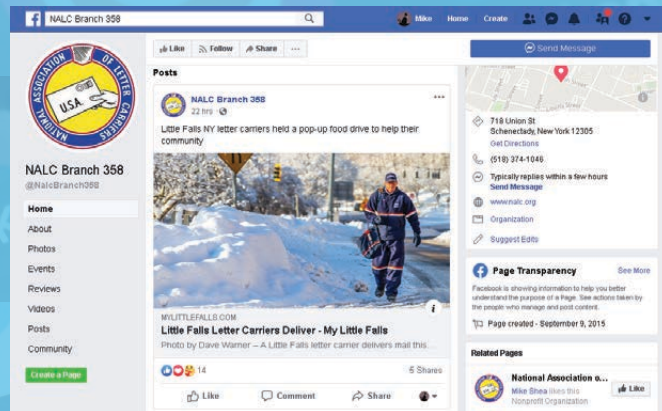
planned for it to be much more interactive with the members.

"Originally, what I thought is that it would be a conversation [with the membership] where we could go back and forth," Bottom said. But members were not commenting on the page as frequently as he had expected. Instead, he realized that the Facebook page was excellent at keeping his branch connected to other NALC branches.

"Carriers around the country have similar concerns, similar jobs," Bottom said. "[The social media pages] boosted our sense of community and solidarity—and this enhanced our ability to work in concert."

Once the site's goal has been set, the subsequent Twitter or Facebook posts have to follow that tone. For branches that use their social media as a tool for legislative purposes, this can be a tricky tightrope to walk without becoming too negative or controversial.

"That's the toughest part—convincing the membership, particularly younger members, that this does affect their jobs," Canton, OH Branch 238 member **Gary Scherer**, who is one of several Facebook administrators for the branch, explained.



Left: Central California Branch 231's Twitter account

Above: The Facebook page for Northeastern New York Branch 358

Ganey agreed about the added challenge surrounding legislative posts, especially given the overall positive tone of his branch's page. But he has found a way to promote the union's legislative goals without sparking controversy. "I lean toward positive political content to improve the Letter Carrier Political Fund contributions," Ganey said. "I stay away from the opinionated content."

However, for Ontario, CA Branch 1439 member **Mark Lesch**, who runs the Twitter and Facebook pages for the California State Association of Letter Carriers, the legislative messaging always has been the key goal. "It's all about advancing the goals of the NALC," he said. In March, a letter-writing campaign that he posted on the accounts received an unusually high amount of online interaction. "[It] got a lot of shares, which means that people were forwarding it on to family members or co-workers," Lesch said.

One of the added benefits of social media is that it allows members to communicate directly with the branch about their needs, questions and concerns. By looking at what type of content is generating the most feedback and interest from members, branches can tailor their accounts to best suit their membership.

Ganey has found that the posts with the most comments tend to be positive local stories: announcements about retiring members or pictures from 50-year pin ceremonies. "Those get local interaction,"

he said, such as "people in the comments saying, 'Good job, good career.'"

Lesch says that he too gets higher levels of membership interaction on more localized content. "Quite a few people are appreciative when I put up pictures of people winning awards or things like that," he said. "[Those posts] seem to resonate with a lot of people."

Mike Hayden, president of Toledo, OH Branch 100, has been running his branch's Facebook page since 2012, and says he's noticed an uptick in membership response during the COVID-19 crisis. "Updates about the current situation, thank-yous [to letter carriers] get shared quite a bit," Hayden said. The branch has even received feedback from the general public. "We've had customers posting supportive things on our page," he said.

On the other hand, the New Jersey Merged Branch 38 Facebook page is closed to non-members, which Otero thinks has positively affected the site. "This way, we can keep the comments going," he said. For example, when members have specific questions about new memorandums of understanding (MOUs), they can ask questions about the changes directly on the page without worrying that any part of the dialogue will be seen by non-members.

Besides security, Otero's other aim for the page is to post new information as quickly as possible—a practice that has elicited a lot of positive feedback

from members. When new guidelines were posted online by NALC's Twitter account, "within a minute... we had it up on the branch site," Otero said. "[Local members] asked me to post it the next day, and I told them, 'It's been up since yesterday!'"

Overall, the social media administrators who were interviewed agreed that their Facebook and Twitter accounts have been good for their branch. The pages have boosted membership engagement with officers and each other, while helping branch leadership communicate news and promote legislative efforts. For any members thinking about starting a page for their own branch, Hayden had a few final words of advice: "Engage your members, be respectful and try to be positive," he said.

Ganey encourages administrators to take the long view on content. "When I post from the page, it's coming from Branch 358," he said. "So, I always have to think, what do I want Branch 358 to represent?"

Otero and Bottom emphasized the influence that administrators have over the tone of the site. "People like to hear good news, and they want to stay informed," Otero said.

Lesch agreed, and noted that given this influence, it's crucial to get other members to contribute to the site. "It shouldn't be just one person; it can't be just my voice," he said. "Everyone has to be involved." **PR**