

Rounding Up Resources for Agricultural Teachers: Utilizing a Blog and Social Media to Disseminate Quality Resources

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

The Owl Pellets Facebook page was created by university faculty from across the country to serve as a multifaceted, social media extension tool that provides professional development by disseminating current research to practicing agricultural educators. Social media metrics have benefited extension personnel in distributing information and monitoring stakeholder interest and impact (Gharis Bardon, Evans, Hubbard, & Taylor, 2014; Kinsey, 2010). A case study on user engagement was completed after the first year of the Owl Pellets page (Warner, Hassan, Myers, Shoulders, & Baker, 2017). The case study found that more frequent posting led to more user engagement. As a result of these findings, the Owl Pellets team designed a schedule for daily posts to increase user engagement. Each Wednesday, the Owl Pellets page publishes a blog that promotes high quality resources that align with the podcast topic for the week. These resources are designed to help teachers put the ideas discussed by researchers into practice in their classrooms. The Resource Round-Up posts address the recommendation of Guskey (2002) to find creative techniques to support teacher implementation of new education practices gained from professional development. Teachers have acknowledged social media for playing an essential role in their lifelong learning and professional development (Öztürk, Öztürk, & Özen, 2016) and engage with social media daily (Forte, Humphreys, & Park, 2012; Öztürk et al., 2016). It has been recognized for providing teacher autonomy in professional learning (Bissessar, 2014; Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Edwards, Darwent, & Irons, 2015) and flexibility of access (Bissessar, 2014; Edwards et al., 2015).

How it Works

Each week a theme is identified based upon the research presented via the published infographics and podcasts. Owl Pellets staff search for resources that will facilitate the implementation of the research practices discussed by the researchers. These resources are reviewed and synthesized into a blog post with links and suggestions for use. The blog post is published and automatically shared through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram social media platforms. Teachers utilize these resources within their own programs and share them with their fellow teachers.

Results to Date/Implications

During the first two months of Resource Round-Up posts, eight posts have been published. Topics of the published posts include: animals in the classroom, internationalizing your agriculture program, increasing teacher effectiveness, building the self-efficacy of students, integrating STEM into your classroom and outreach programs, career counseling, college counseling, and making substitute planning easier. Table 1 provides a summary of the Facebook analytic data of those posts (Facebook, 2016).

Table 1. Facebook insights for Resource Round-Up posts.

	Animals	Internat- ionalizing	Teaching Effectiveness	Self-efficacy	STEM	Careers	Colleges	Sub Plans	Total
Time of posting	14:15	12:51	12:31	7:55	7:54	13:12	6:57	18:26	n/a
People post was served to	721	254	335	1189	3660	861	616	2984	10620
People who saw post	111	83	104	53	587	411	395	1322	3066
People engaged with post	24	3	12	47	58	24	13	156	337
People who clicked on post (unique)	15	2	8	39	40	17	9	143	273
Likes	10	1	4	6	18	9	5	20	73
Comments	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7
Shares	4	1	2	3	11	3	1	7	32

Furthermore, the additional activity on the page has contributed to 446 new page likes during the two-month period, a 28% increase. These posts allow the Owl Pellets team to reach more agriculture teachers across the nation on a weekly basis with professional development resources than the team could consistently reach with extension programs meeting in person. Moreover, teachers are able to access these resources at a time when they are most beneficial for them. The blogs posted in the evening tended to have more engagement and clicks. Additionally, certain topics seemed to garner more interest.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The Owl Pellets team plans to continue weekly posting of Resource Round-Up blogs as one method of delivering professional development to ag teachers. As more data points are collected, more thorough analysis will be conducted to determine the optimal posting times for teacher engagement. Additionally, the team is working on gathering topics of interest from teachers so the posts can be designed to meet their immediate needs. If engaging clientele in extension or professional development through social media, page managers should make an effort to post regularly throughout the week (Houk & Thornhill, 2013; Warner et al., 2017). Additionally, page managers should monitor the post and look for trends related to best time to post, types of posts preferred, and content with the most engagement.

Costs/Resources Needed

The resources used to complete teacher extension and professional development through social media included a Wordpress website; Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram social media platforms; and access to various resources across the internet. All of these can be created at no-cost, although a paid subscription to Wordpress would allow more control over the publishing of the blog. The major investment in this program is time. Several hours must be devoted to finding, selecting, and reviewing high quality resources for each blog post. Additionally, time is required to post, monitor, and respond to posts on social media platforms.

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