

# Social Media and Law Enforcement

Social media is a powerful and prolific communication medium among the public, replacing traditional forms like television and print. The Department's desire to communicate with the public is part of the charter of Law Enforcement. Therefore, utilizing technology (i.e., Social Media) is critical for the Department to maintain effective communication with the public. To be effective, Social Media requires collective participation. Management by the Public Affairs Office or by a PIO is insufficient and ineffective. Social Media is a tool that can help the Department accomplish the goals of improving our community through communication and cooperation.

Social media is the new standard in communication, and agencies who centralize its use solely through the Public Affairs office are missing an opportunity to engage the community on an individual level not seen since the adoption of the police car. Departments that utilize an authoritarian approach to centralized communication via a single social media channel further isolate themselves from the public's reality, while dehumanizing their officer in the process.

The current state of social media usage by law enforcement must be altered to allow all officer's immediate and unfettered access to the public they serve, by whichever channels are the most beneficial to serve the needs of both entities. To achieve this outcome, attitudes, as well as policies, will need to change regarding social media. Additionally, adopting a known and well established model for training will allow departments and academies to more easily transition to more inclusive models of social media use for all agency personnel.

## Introduction

In February 2014 when Dallas Police Chief David Brown asked his supervisors to find personnel who would voluntarily "tweet," eyebrows were raised.

An early adopter of social media, Chief Brown had previously been noted in local and regional press for his use of social media to announce events, department decisions, even to openly discuss employee misconduct and discipline. Reaction to the request for "tweet volunteers" announcement was met with skepticism and resentment from the ranks of the police department.

The vice president of the Dallas Police Association said, "I don't think it's the proper use of police resources. I think the citizens of Dallas expect us to investigate crimes, answer calls, and put bad folks in jail... that's what we do."

"To be honest with you, he continued, "I don't think the city leaders or taxpayers expect us to be tweeting when we should be arresting people."

An online law enforcement website reacted with the title, "[Dallas chief wants officers tweeting from crime scenes](#)," promoting members of the website to not only question the soundness of the policy, but to also request Chief Brown's removal based on psychological reasons.

The Dallas Police Department intended to better connect with their public. From their initial press briefing: "We want officers to be prepared to use social media to speak directly to citizens in the case of major critical incidents, like the bombings in Boston [April 2013]."

Social media had provided the Boston Police with valuable real-time information, which greatly assisted the department in the search and eventual arrest of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, later convicted for the bombing. Social media had worked for the police in Boston, and after nearly a year of thought, Dallas' Chief Brown hoped it would work for his agency too, but social media is a tough subject for most law enforcement agencies today. It's been this way since the beginning.

## History

How law enforcement came to its current anti-position on social media has its roots in the early missteps of many departments' early adopters. While every region in the country has an example of law enforcement using social media badly, the following example from a young State Trooper in Central Indiana is typical.

On June 17, 2009 Indiana State Trooper Chris Pestow resigned from the Indiana State Police rather than face discipline from his department. Media reports at the time indicated he faced internal charges including violating department policy, improper use of department equipment and four violations of conduct unbecoming an officer but the real reason he resigned was Facebook.

Acquiring a Facebook account in 2008 Trooper Pestow posted a variety of questionable postings relating to his personal habits and opinions about his agency and his work.

WTHR News (Indianapolis) "broke" the story in [March 2009](#) with these comments:

*Over the past several months, Pestow has used his Facebook page to brag of heavy drinking. He also posted pictures of a crash involving his ISP cruiser.*

*"Oops! Where did my front end go?" he wrote when he posted the picture. Later, while discussing the accident with his friends on Facebook, Pestow added, "Kiss my butt, Not my fault."*

*And he isn't shy about sharing his views of police work, referring to himself as not a state trooper, but as a "garbage man." His Facebook page said, "I pick up trash for a living."*

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*Police say what [WTHR] 13 Investigates found on Trooper Chris Pestow's personal Facebook page is embarrassing and might even be against the law. Some of the entries showed Pestow with a .357 Magnum pointed at his head, drinking what he described as lots of beer with his buddies and lewd horseplay.*



The resulting investigations would ultimately prompt Pestow's resignation and produce a short suspension of Indianapolis Metro Police Department Officer Andrew Deddish (pictured with weapon).

Less than two months after the media broke the story ISP Assistant Superintendent, Colonel Richard S. Weigand, issued a [stern memo](#) to the Troops on the use of Electronic Technology. It included:

Employees shall comply with the following:

- 1) Except in the performance of an authorized duty, employees shall not post, transmit, reproduce, and/or disseminate information (text, pictures, video, audio, etc.) to the internet or any other forum (public or private) that would tend to discredit or reflect unfavorably upon the employee, Department, or any of the Department's employees.
- 2) Employees may only use Department computers for reasonable and limited personal use; and that use is *de minimus* (so minimal or insignificant that it does not give rise to a level of sufficient concern to be dealt with judicially). Use of Department computers to access social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc.); or to buy, sell, or trade, whether of a personal or business nature (eBay, Overstock, etc.) is not considered reasonable, limited, or de minimus use. Employees who wish to utilize department computers to join or visit professional-business related networking sites shall request permission, through channels from their appropriate zone, division, or district commander.
- 3) Employees shall not represent themselves as an employee of the Department in a public forum with any information, opinion, or posture that would tend to discredit or reflect unfavorably upon the employee, Department, or any of the Department's employees.

The document concluded with:

*Superintendent Whitesell and his staff stand firm to protect the hard-earned reputation of this agency and will take swift and immediate actions toward any member who would disparage our good name...*

Upon careful reading, the memorandum does not prevent personnel from posting to social media on their own time. In fact it does not prevent employees from posting or engaging social media at all. It only restricts the time and nature of those posts. But the general intent and its effect was altogether clear. Social media is bad, and this administration (like many others in US law enforcement during this time) will take swift and immediate actions toward any member who uses it. So nobody did.

Memos like this one from the Indiana State Police and other agencies during the advent of social media time were common and intended to "nip" bad behavior among their ranks "in the bud." Their effect was more pronounced than they could have ever imagined. Instead of engaging a new medium for communication with the public, they completely stifled their personnel's opportunity to learn and master the space. This is a learning deficit is still painfully apparent today.

Chris Pestow was not the first Trooper to drink with buddies, nor was Andrew Deddish the first officer to rough play with a duty weapon. Nor were they the first to have their actions photographed for posterity. And surely, the command officers who disciplined these two must have been thankful they did not "come up" during a time of cell phones, internet and social media.

The job of being "law enforcement" comes with its rewards and challenges. In years past, behavior like what cost Trooper Pestow his career and Officer Deddish a few days off without pay would have been looked upon by the "old timers" as minor in the cathedral of bad behavior and misdeeds. A person doesn't have to reach too far back in the history of most law enforcement agencies to know that these exploits by young personnel simply wouldn't have raised much attention.

But with the advent of social media, fast internet, and the reduction in activities in which previous generations of law enforcement accepted as common place (e.g. "choir practice" or drinking excessively after shift with peers in a "police bar"), everything changed quickly for generation of officer entering the field in the first decade of the new century.

Previous generations of law enforcement, their friends and families, knew that their jobs were inherently dangerous and often traumatic. Responding daily to situations where people were at their lowest point, being the only stable force in the environment, and requiring the officer to calmly assess and process the situation to a peaceful resolution has been well documented to prematurely shortening the

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officer's lives, even if they weren't killed or visibly injured on the job.

The "old timers" in a department knew the truth about being on the job. So when a couple of young officers went out drinking, they took it in stride, knowing their lives were truly in danger on a regular basis, and that they would likely be exposed to the death and destruction of lives in the furtherance of their jobs, they were forgiven for their indulgences.

But with the dawn of social media, cell phone and the internet, what had been as secret was now public, what had been accepted was now admonished, and what had been dealt with internally now had to be publically accounted and often, especially with the early cases, dealt with quickly and harshly. Choir practice was over.

### Arguments against Social Media and Law Enforcement

The argument against law enforcement using social media are well founded, and most frequently come more from the departments and their personnel more often than from the public. Not based on mere anecdotal evidence, there are numerous examples of law enforcement officers misusing the medium, embarrassing themselves and their departments.

At the turn of the last decade, agencies saw the negative effects of social media and reacted swiftly. Officers and personnel saw the effects of those actions and learn vicariously that anything to do with social media is likely detrimental to their careers.

The common arguments against officers using social media have remained consistent since its inception:

"They going to jeopardize a case"

"We can't trust these guys to do it right"

"What if they get it wrong?"

"It's the PIOs job"

"It's not a unified message if 20 cops are doing it"

"Officer Safety, it's not safe to tweet"

"They should be arresting people, not updating their social media profile"

And while the arguments against law enforcement's use of social media have solid standing, they do not provide any insight or solution to the reality of the situation: Social media is not a fad, it is a fact. It's used by millions of Americans as a *primary* source of news, information and interaction with their peers. But law enforcement isn't part of conversation.

When looked at objectively, it seems almost bizarre that law enforcement, a group dedicated to serving the needs of the public,

save for a few posts by the Public Information Officer, is nearly completely absent from this primary medium of interaction.

Another recent example of social media and its impact helps make the point that law enforcement needs to better understand social media, change its attitudes toward the medium and embrace a new models of behavior for its personnel.

### Ferguson, Missouri

In August 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, Michael Brown, was shot and killed by Ferguson Police Department Officer Darren Wilson after a routine pedestrian stop.

News reports at the time of the incident didn't reveal what was to become a national debate on police use of force, racial bias in law enforcement, marked by months of national protests and riots.

[This from KSDK-TV](#) (St. Louis, MO.) August 14, 2014, 5 days after the shooting:

*ST. LOUIS COUNTY, Mo. — An 18-year-old shot and killed near a Ferguson apartment complex Saturday afternoon had no criminal record, according to the St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney's office.*

*According to police, Brown pushed a Ferguson Police Department officer into his car. Then, both struggled and at some point, Brown reached for the officer's weapon before a shot fired inside of the car followed by a number of other shots. Brown was not armed.*

*St. Louis County Prosecutor's office confirmed that Brown had no prior misdemeanors or felonies against him.*

*A preliminary autopsy showed Brown died from gunshot wounds. An official autopsy will be released later.*

*Wednesday afternoon, Brown's body was turned over to his family. Wednesday evening, police again used tear gas to disperse crowds that gathered in the predominantly black suburb of St. Louis.*

After exhaustive investigations by the St. Louis County Police Department, the St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (and a seated grand jury), The Missouri Highway Patrol, the Missouri Governor's Office, and the U.S. Department of Justice, Officer Wilson was cleared of any wrongdoing, found to have acted properly, and in self-defense, in accordance to his agencies policies.

Even though subsequent investigations by the U.S. Department of Justice would find the Ferguson Police Department severely lacking in its service of the citizens of Ferguson, MO, the shooting of Michael Brown was ruled reasonable and justifiable, within the acceptable standards for law enforcement.

Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. himself released [an 86-page report](#) detailing the findings of the Justice Department's work,

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concluding, "The facts do not support the filing of criminal charges against Officer Darren Wilson in this case. "For those who feel otherwise, he said, "I urge you to read this report in full."

So how did a justifiable shooting in a blighted suburb of St. Louis create unrest and riots in cities across the US and gain world attention? The long answer is that a powder keg of injustice was stockpiled for years among the mostly black citizens of Ferguson policed by a poorly managed mostly white department. The shooting of Michael Brown, justifiable or not in the eyes of the law or in the courtroom of public opinion, was the match tossed onto the pyre. The short answer is: Social Media.

### Social Media's Role

If not for social media the events of the Michael Brown shooting would have likely been reduced to a footnote in a use of force report. Outside of the families of Brown and Wilson, their lives being changed forever by the events, many people would have forgotten about the events if they had ever heard of them. But social media played a prominent role in the dissemination of the incident, magnifying the impact of the events, creating a compelling narrative, and initiating a chain-reaction of angry and protests.

Michael Brown was not the first, unarmed black man killed by white police officers, but the image of him lying face down in a street as a pool of sun blackened blood was the first of its kind launched via social media onto tens of thousands of cell phones nationwide.

As the image (and videos) of Michael Brown laying in the street were disseminated (a feat easily accomplished by numerous people with even modest cell phones, since his body was left exposed), the facts of the case, would play a secondary role to the tidal wave of information being shared via social media. The image of Brown might have been enough on its own to push the populace to action. But there was much more to come, social media was just getting warmed up.



[Michael Brown lies in street](#) uncovered for 4 hours.

Almost immediately following the shooting, Dorian Johnson, who was walking with Michael Brown in the street prior to their contact with Officer Wilson, began to release a version of events which added gasoline to the already smoldering situation. Johnson claimed that Wilson, not Brown, was the aggressor, swearing at the young men from inside his patrol vehicle, slamming his door against them both, grabbing Michael Brown around the neck and pulling him into his car, where he first shot him. Later as Michael Brown fled for his life, according to Dorian Johnson, Officer Brown ran him down before shooting him execution style, Brown open hands raised to sky begging the officer to stop shooting. This version of the story (later deemed "unreliable" based both on numerous witness accounts and the forensic evidence) went viral, then it went super critical. It was a compelling, and for many believable scenario, and more importantly, it was the *only* story being told.



Elizabeth Matthews Twitter, [August 10, 2014](#), News 5 KSDK

The story of an innocent black young man being shot to death in the street by a rogue white officer was simply more compelling than the truth, even when the facts were presented by credible sources. And social media wasn't done just yet.

As if the narrative of brutal, racist police killing unarmed black children in the streets wasn't enough, the images coming from the early Ferguson protests continued to paint a picture of a department. Ferguson Police (presumably mostly white) in full riot gear facing off against angry black crowds. Images of St. Louis County Police Tactical Team scoping the crowds behind the optics of a .308 rifle didn't ease the tension in the city. Many commented on

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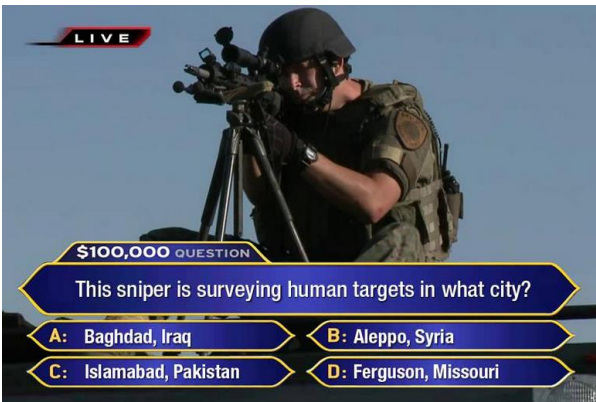
social media that the images seemed more appropriate for Iraq or Afghanistan than a St. Louis suburb.



Jeff Roberson/AP August 13, 2014



Police officers in riot gear confronted a man Monday night during a protest in Ferguson, Mo., over the shooting of Mr. Brown. [Whitney Curtis for The New York Times](#)



Social media was quick to mock the activity [August 14, 2014](#)

### Easing of Tensions

On August 15<sup>th</sup> two things happened which changed the tone and eased the tensions in Ferguson, and one which re-ignited the fire. First, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon put the [Missouri State Highway](#)

[Patrol](#) in charge of security. Second, nearly a week after the shooting, Ferguson Police Chief Thomas Jackson revealed Officer Darren Wilson as the officer who shot Michael Brown. At the same time Wilson was identified, still images of Brown and Dorian Johnson were released showing what was being called a robbery. The timing of the release of the images was questioned, some claimed Missouri's Sunshine laws dictated the time window, the public was skeptical. On August 16<sup>th</sup> video of the robbery itself was released showing Brown stealing approximately \$50 in cigars from behind the store counter, pushing his way out of the store when confronted by the clerk.

Even after the Ferguson Police Department released the in-store video of the theft itself, the tone of the debate didn't change. Instead of changing perceptions of Brown from victim/anti-hero to criminal/robbery suspect it only increased the public's outrage as people took to social media claiming the police were trying to justify the shooting via a character assassination. Before the end of the year, protests would take place in numerous American cities and calls for change would ring from the highest offices. Ferguson was a definable moment of change for law enforcement and the public.

### Reflections on Ferguson: One Year Later

The US Department of Justice would eventually clear Officer Wilson in terms of wrongdoing, but it laid clear indictments against the Ferguson Police Department.

Released in March 2015 the Justice Department's "[Investigations on the Ferguson Police Department](#)" memo stated that "Ferguson's law enforcement efforts are focused on generating revenue and Ferguson's law enforcement practices violate the law and undermine community trust, especially among African-Americans".

The issues facing the citizens of Ferguson, MO and its Police Department were long-standing and well known among both residents and law enforcement. The system of law enforcement as a governmental service to the residents of the community was broken well before Michael Brown attacked and was eventually killed by Officer Wilson. But the events of Wilson and Brown's interaction exposed a simple truth from which many communities (and law enforcement agencies) across the country took notice: The problem was n't isolated to a poorly functioning community outside St. Louis. The problem was everywhere.

Law enforcement across the United States knew but for only a few random changes, the events which embroiled the nation for months, images of protesters carrying signs painted with raised black hands and police in full riot gear, the world would know the name of their city instead of Ferguson, Missouri.

The US Department of Justice report outlined 13 areas of change "necessary to remedy Ferguson's unlawful law enforcement practices and repair community trust." Included were guides on hiring, supervision, community involvement, training, ticketing and arrest practices, use of force, and officer misconduct. But the final

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change could have begun the list, and if even partially implemented would have helped address everything else on the list:

### 13. Publicly Share Information about the Nature and Impact of Police Activities

*Transparency is a key component of good governance and community trust. Providing broad information to the public also facilitates constructive community engagement. FPD should:*

*a. Provide regular and specific public reports on police stop, search, arrest, ticketing, force, and community engagement activities, including particular problems and achievements, and describing the steps taken to address concerns;*

*b. Provide regular public reports on allegations of misconduct, including the nature of the complaint and its resolution;*

*c. Make available online and regularly update a complete set of police policies.*

And while not expressly focused on social media, this final section of the report makes clear that the transparent sharing of material from the police department to the public, online, is a key component of establishing trust and improving relationships.

Clearly social media played a role in the events in Ferguson in August 2014. But Twitter didn't cause "Ferguson", and if the Ferguson Police Department had had a Facebook page in that summer it would not have prevented the ensuing riots and discord after Michael Brown was killed.

But, if Ferguson Police Department had had a different relationship with their community, if they had engaged their community, both in person and online, one could imagine a very different series of events occurring on August 10<sup>th</sup> 2014.

### Solutions, Social Media, and The Magic Bullet

If social media played a role in the build up to the events of the post-shooting of Michael Brown, perhaps it has a role in repairing relationships and creating bridges between citizens and their police.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police's Center for Social Media has surveyed law enforcement's use and application of social media since 2010. Their most recent results ([2014 IACP Social Media Survey](#)) are revealing both about how the field uses social media and how it still limits its effective application. The initial stats are encouraging. Of the 600 agencies surveyed:

- 95% use social media in some capacity;
- 71.7% have a social media policy
- 82.3% use of social media is for criminal investigations

- 78.8% report that social media has helped solve crimes
- 77.5% state that social media has improved police-community relations in their jurisdiction.

But on closer examination, some clear holes are left in the data:

For the question who manages your agency's publicly facing social media accounts on a day to day basis (select all that apply)

- 39.3% Public Information Officer
- 26.7% Command Staff
- 24.1% Chief Executive
- 21.3% Civilian Employee
- 18.2% Officer

Nowhere in the survey does it suggest that individual officers could control their own social media channels. And on training the figures are equally bleak, indicating most agencies do not offer *any training* on social media whatsoever.

67.9% do not offer a cademy training in social media  
52.2% do not offer in-service training in social media

The events of Ferguson, to even a disinterested observer show how powerful a medium social media has become. It is a dynamic, individually lead force, which is capable of quickly establishing "truth", which once lodged into the consciousness is difficult to change even in the face of truth and reality.

Law enforcement must change their perceptions of this media, they must embrace it, and they must utilize it for the good of their own department and their personnel, and for the good of their communities.

### So how are Agencies doing Today?

The IACP study indicates that nearly 100% of law enforcement agencies use some social media *in some capacity*. This standard should not be used as an indicator for effective dialog between a department and its citizens. The fact that most agencies relegate management of their "social media" to their PIO or executive or command staff also shows a major deficit in the dialog between individual officers and the public. Individual officers are still under a mandate, both in policy and practice, to stay off of social media.

One interesting fact that seems to be lost in the noise over the events in Ferguson was that the citizens didn't know the name of the officer who shot Michael Brown, and nobody seems to think this is unusual. But this point alone underlies a much larger problem then even law enforcement's inept understanding and use of social media. It's an indictment on the nature of the base interactions between individual police officer and the people in their immediate districts.

There was a time when officers were well known in their communities, by face and by name. And without waxing nostalgic for times past, (this might have also been the time when street

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justice and choir practice were the norm) but it is nevertheless true: People knew who policed them. This individual connection has been lost. Police officers have been dehumanized with a loss of their individual identity; this is made even more pronounced when officers are placed into helmets and riot gear.

Most officers today (and their agencies) take great strides to remain anonymous, and in today's interconnected society that feat is increasingly difficult, that they are as effective at it as they are speaks to the underlying effort.

Social media is best run by individuals. Concerns about individual officers running social media have always been the norm, but without training how could they be expected to achieve even satisfactory performances?

### The Proposal

Law enforcement has a national level problem with communication and relations with the public. Any solution to the overall problem must address transparency, information dissemination and access. And all of these can be greatly facilitated by social media.

To build (and in many cases to re-build) trust within a community a law enforcement agency must fundamentally re-think social media, the roles social media plays in the lives and careers of individual officers, existing social media policies and the department's relationship with their community. To meet these goals, we offer the following vision statement:

**All officers and agency personnel, after receiving training in use, agency goals and standards, should be allowed to manage social media channels of their own choosing, independent of direct oversight, with the full support of their Executive and Department.**

One of the first steps in implementing this vision is to recognize that social media cannot, as it has been done in the past, be managed by a single point within a police department. This authoritarian perspective of centralized communication is diametrically opposed to the tenants of social media and it does not work. Social media is by definition: Social. It cannot be effectively controlled by a single spokesperson. It is the most effective when it is allowed to ebb and flow across the internet. The undisciplined, fluid nature of social media is difficult for law enforcement to accept, but it is the only way social media can operate.

### Training

#### Training Law Enforcement: Weapons

As a group, Law Enforcement is familiar with training. Starting at the Academy personnel become familiar with a process for acquiring new skills. Students begin with classroom training then move on to hands-on practical exercises. More challenging skills include mentorship and closer monitoring before personnel are allowed to utilize a skill independent of supervision. Every law enforcement officer in the United States since the 1980s has gone through this process to acquire most basic policing skills and virtually all psycho-

motor skills techniques (for example: firearms, driving, and defensive tactics). The more valuable the skill to policing, and the greater chance that incorrect officer action could violate the law, cause injury or incur civil liability the longer and more precise the training.

Weapons training is the classic example for how personnel are trained. Most law enforcement personnel in a 20 year career will never shoot their duty weapon in the course of their duties, but weapons training typically involves the longest single block of training at the academy, and the most frequent subject to require continual annual training and re-certification. In short, because of the potential for harm or misuse, personnel are trained (throughout their careers) for something, statistically, they will never use.

#### Training Law Enforcement: Social Media

Effective social media training will require the same levels of training (although not nearly as extensive) as weapons training. Before officers are allowed by their departments to engage the public with social media they should receive similar training as they receive in weapons, tactics or driving. The consequences of allowing personnel to utilize social media yet not properly training them, are equal to if not greater than not providing an officer a duty weapon without training them in its use.

The steps to actually provide law enforcement personnel needed social media skills are the following: **Classroom training** (either instructor led, or possibly online training), **Hands-on training** (to provide real world. **Mentorship**, and supervisor during the early stages after training to ensure the quality, tone and nature of the officer's communication are within the culture and policy of the department. Officers, even if allowed (and encouraged to do so by policy and practice) will be gun-shy about posting to social media. They have been admonished to curtail their use of the medium for a long time. Knowing (and believing) that they will not be administratively disciplined if they "do something wrong" during this learning process will go a long way toward developing a valuable asset for the agency. Finally the last step is: **Independent Action with Discretion**. If an agency is to take full advantage of social media, then its officers and indeed all of their personnel, will need to operate independently, without requesting permission from a superior for individual tweets or posts. Officers on the street don't ask permission to stop a vehicle. They have been trained in operations, policy and procedures, and are allowed to take independent action. But they are also trained to use discretion, which is the freedom to decide what should be done in a particular situation. Just because an officer can write a citation, doesn't mean they are obliged to write one for every infraction. Social media postings are the same. Tweeting from a crime scene may be a very logical course of action, given the circumstances, but it may be also be the wrong decision. With experience (and training and mentorship) those decisions are more and more likely to be correct.

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### Model Policy Considerations

The IACP [Social Media Model Policy](#) (rev. 2010), is often used as basis for individual agencies in the creating their own policy. But it misses several key components of a modern understanding of social media. Namely that social media cannot be controlled (or centralized) and, a corollary, that it cannot wait for a authorization from a central source. The IACP Policy also fails to guide agencies in methods of deployment across their entire agency, which can provide countless benefits to both the department, their personnel and the people they serve. Instead of guidance for individual officers, a full two page of the five page policy is dedicated to Precautions and Prohibitions.

Law enforcement, frequently embraces policy development by creating a reactive policy based on previous negative experiences: guide to make sure that a mistake is not repeated. But very little forethought is given to permission. A policy shift should be made to direct officers in the correct use of social media rather than a list of things that can get them in trouble.

### Conclusion

In August 2014 Dallas Police Chief David Brown, along with Dallas County District Attorney Craig Watkins and Dallas County Sheriff Lupe Valdez [held town meetings](#) to let members of the public vent their frustration over the events in Ferguson.

"I'd much rather they shout at me at a town hall meeting at a church and get to know me afterward than not have a relationship," Brown said. After a police shooting has already happened, "it's too late to try to establish relationships."

About the mistrust black and latino communities have with the police, Craig Watkins added, "This is a reality that we deal with in this country. And until we face it, we're always going to have issues like Ferguson. I don't want to have the same thing happen here [in Dallas]."

Indeed, there is a wide gulf of trust between communities of color and the often disproportionately white officer that police them. Because of this reality, communication channels and entire systems need to be developed and utilized. Social media will not be the answer for all of society's ills but it can and will, if utilized appropriately, by all members of a law enforcement department, make great strides in re-humanizing officers, and re-connecting citizens and the men and women who offer their lives to police them.

### Communications Model Policy

#### Prologue:

***Social media is a powerful and prolific communication medium among the public, replacing traditional forms like television and print. The Department's desire to communicate with the public is part of the charter of Law Enforcement. Therefore, utilizing***

***technology (e.g. Social Media) is critical for the Department to maintain effective communication with the public. Social Media is at its core: Social. To be effective Social Media requires collective participation, management by the Public Affairs Office or by a PIO is insufficient and ineffective. Social Media is a tool which can help the Department accomplish the goals of improving our community through communication and cooperation.***

#### Department Sanctioned Use of Social Media

- 100.01 The terms "Social Media" refer to a variety of internet based sites/services which allow people to communication with one another by posting (typically in a public forum) via an established system; participants can provide direct and immediate feedback.
  - a. Social Media includes but is not limited the following: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Nixle, Citizen Observer, YouTube, Instagram and Vine.
  - b. A "Post" refers to the act of publishing content or responding existing content.
- 100.02 The XXX Department (herein referred to as the Department) fully endorses the use of Social Media for police personnel to communicate with the citizens in their community. As such this policy is considered to be a proactive approach to allowing staff, officers, supervisors and executives to use Social Media individually and collectively to communicate to the public.
- 100.03 The Chief of Police or his/her designee will oversee the Department's Social Media strategy.
- 100.04 Prior to first use, personnel will receive **Training** on Social Media
  - a. Training will include classroom and hands-on practical applications.
  - b. Training will address effective uses of Social Media to benefit the Public and the Department.
  - c. Training will address applications and uses for all Department personnel regardless of position or rank.
- 100.05 After initial Training, personnel will receive **Mentorship** in the use of Social Media.
  - a. A member's supervisor shall regularly monitor postings to Social Media.
  - b. Supervisors shall give regular feedback to employees on their use of Social Media.
  - c. Supervisors will take corrective actions on issues that are deemed to violate any police of the XXX Department.



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- 100.06 Work related postings may be done on Department issued computer equipment. Personal use of Social Media can be done in the context of the personal use agreement provided by the Department.
- 100.07 Personnel recognize the need for officer safety and victim safety while using Social Media:
- Social Media will only be used when it does not distract the officer from any serious or tactical situation.
  - Social media will not be used to broadcast victim information that can readily identify a victim of a crime or otherwise create harm for a victim.
  - Personnel in doubt about posting on Social Media channels, should consult a Supervisor for guidance and/or authorization.

### Records Retention/Terms of Use Disclaimer

- 100.10 Social media will be monitored on a regular basis. However, disclaimers will be placed on Social Media channels that they will not be monitored on a 24 hour basis. While not monitored on a 24 hour basis all personnel using Social Media will respond to requests as soon as practical.
- 100.11 Records will be retained in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and/or State and local record retention policies.
- 100.12 A disclaimer will be posted on each Social Media channel which states that Posts will be removed if they violate the terms of use established by the Department.
- 100.13 Any Post removed from a Social Media site will be saved and catalogued by the Department.
- 100.14 Members of the Public who are "banned" from using Department Social Media channels will be given a reason for their bans should an inquiry be made.

### Investigations Use of Social Media

- 100.15 Department personnel are encouraged and should use social media when practical during any criminal investigation.
- 100.16 Personnel who create an alias profile are bound by the terms of use for the social media platform, and as such understand that the profile can be deactivated by the social media platform.
- 100.17 Any electronic evidence found in a social media network during an investigation should be captured, collected or otherwise saved to identify when, where and how the evidence was obtained.

- 100.18 The posting of suspects on a social media site is to enhance the opportunity to catch the suspect trying to escape detection and is therefore authorized and encouraged, provided:
- As soon as practical, pictures of suspects should be removed when the suspect is captured
  - Allowing public comments to continue on a post could potentially inhibit a fair trial. Investigators should be mindful of removing posts that continue to generate comments that could harm a prosecution.
  - Victim and witness information should be kept off social media postings when at all possible and practical.

### **About the Authors**

#### **Doug Nolte**

Doug Nolte is an Instructor with POLICE TECHNICAL. He is the Commander of the Information Services Unit and serves as the Public Information Officer for a department in southern Kansas. He's a nineteen year veteran.

Mr. Nolte has advocated for the use of technology and information sharing as a key component in addressing crime and fear of crime. His practical knowledge of law enforcement operations and work with various civic communities has helped him create more effective online social programming benefiting citizens and departments alike.

In addition to social media training Mr. Nolte serves as a consultant and administrator for various law enforcement related social media communities, including Police Technical. Mr. Nolte lives in Kansas with his wife and children.

#### **Thomas Manson**

Thomas Manson is the founder and CEO of Police Technical.

For 15 years he has worked as a national law enforcement trainer and conference speaker. He is experienced with training and case preparation at Federal, State, County and Municipal levels.

Mr. Manson has developed more than 20 instructor led training (ILT) courses for law enforcement and public safety. Most recently he has overseen the expansion of POLICE TECHNICAL services to include: Publishing, software development, online training, and a consulting-based solutions services division. Mr. Manson lives in Indiana with his wife and children.

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