The Shorthorn’s Approach to Social Media

Prepared by Abraham Mohamad
Introduction

Social media grows more and more as a reporting tool each year. The Shorthorn was a central news source for many as back-to-back winter ice storms that affected the state’s power grid left our readers needing real-time information. The Shorthorn kept readers constantly informed, answering questions and providing local contact information at the university and the City of Arlington.

UTA is not a football campus, so the university puts its attention on the basketball program. In the spring 2022 semester, the women’s basketball program captured its first Sun Belt championship since joining the conference in the 2013-2014 academic year and advancing to the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

The Shorthorn engaged with readers through Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The Shorthorn has a fully staffed engagement desk with an editor and three producers dedicated to its social media presence and newsletter production. We also encourage staff members to live tweet events and share their work on social media to engage with and be more transparent with readers.
Instagram

In 2021, our newsroom experimented with Instagram stories and stand-alone informative posts on the grid. We still kept our “head on photo” design this year that allows for visually appealing content to grab our readers’ attention and helped distinguish our breaking news posts on Instagram.

We also work with the multimedia desk to use our photos at events as backgrounds for our social media cards. The Shorthorn believes in visual storytelling and its powerful impact for social media users.

We also brought back an effective feature, The Shorthorn Rewind, to bring readers up to speed with our past articles.
Twitter

Through the pandemic and winter storms, our staff relied on internal communication in terms of social media reporting.

At the beginning of each semester, a newsroom-wide group message is created on Twitter so staffers can share tweets and promote content.

This comes in handy during breaking news situations or when reporters are trying to gather hard-to-find sources. It also allows breaking news to be quickly spread to a wider audience.

We also understand the importance of increasing visibility on the readers' timeline by sharing and retweeting one another's content.

To the right is an example of the group message and how we're able to make sure the community is informed in a timely manner.

Below are examples of staff tweets.
The Shorthorn contest entry: "Social Media Reporting"
Facebook

Over the past couple years, our newsroom got a better understanding of using different voice and tone for the different audiences on each social media platform. If Instagram readers enjoy well-designed social cards and captivating images, our Twitter audience follows along as news breaks, and readers on Facebook enjoy short captions — even if we have unlimited amount of characters.

Using the algorithm, we understand our Facebook audience prefers stories about community outreach and editorial content, thus can better service the community of Arlington.