



Beyond Bandwidth: Social Media for #Ag Development Practitioners

Presentation Transcript

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Presenters:

Dustin Andres
FHI 360

Michael Riggs
UN Food & Agriculture Organization

Facilitator:

Zachary Baquet
USAID Bureau for Food Security

Sponsor
United States Agency for International Development

Zachary Baquet: I'm glad everyone could join us. I'm very excited about the topic and the speakers. I was very pleased to have this opportunity to collaborate on the release of FACET's, you know, and the work that Josh Woodard and Dustin Andres had put together on the social media guide handbook, and so I think this is a great piece to add to the other handbooks that they had put out, one for low-cost video and the other one for radio all for agriculture practitioners, and I think this represents a really great set and they've done some outstanding work. I think the *Social Media Handbook for Agricultural Development Practitioners* is very relevant right now with the increased use of social media. I've been reading some other documents that have come out recently, the Alliance for Useful Evidence, a group has put out the social media and public policy, what is the evidence, kind of looking at the evidence drawn from social media to enhance public services, and how can this inform the development of public policy, as well as another recent one from the Institute for Development Studies, about using mobile phones for nutrition surveillance and some of the evidence behind that for the process of helping to reduce hunger and under-nutrition.

So, for today's webinar, Dustin and Michael Riggs will be talking about the handbook developed under USAID's FACET project, and we'll explore how harnessing social media can help agricultural development and practitioners around the globe. So, just a brief introduction for them: Dustin Andres is a social media communication specialist for TechLab at FHI 360, and he specializes in using online platforms to build communities in support of development, multimedia storytelling, online content creation, and using analytics to increase audience engagement and collaboration. He worked on creating the online communication strategy for USAID's FACET project, and he manages the ICT for Ag channels on Twitter and Facebook.

Michael Riggs is part of the FAO, or Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and he advises agricultural development and facilitates learning and good practices on the use of information and communication technologies. He manages the e-Agriculture Community, a global online network of over 10,000 ICT for Ag practitioners with the goal of improving ICT's positive impact. He created the communication strategy for e-Agriculture and manages its Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels. With that, I will pass the control of the mic over to Dustin.

Dustin Andres: Hi. Can everyone hear me okay? I hope so. This is Dustin Andres, and I'm really excited to be here. I have spent about five months developing this Social Media

for Agricultural Practitioner Handbook that was released this week in collaboration with my colleague, Josh Woodard, who also works on USAID's FACET project. A couple of thank-you's to get out of the way while we start. So, first, I would like to thank Zachary and Julie and the rest of the BFS team for letting us present today. I've been impressed with their skill at outreach and in doing these webinars, and in social media outreach, so it's been great collaborating with them over the course of the FACET project, and I'd also like to thank Judy Payne, who is our supervisor in AOR at USAID and who has been very supportive of new media outreach, so thanks to both.

Let's start with the social media handbook quickly. This is free and interactive. It's available at ICTforAg.org/social, and it's there for you to dig into. What you'll find there is a host of tips and tricks for how to deal with social media, how to think through on a project level, on a personal level, a bunch of foundational research, and it's all designed for development practitioners, including those in agriculture. To start with, so the state of social media globally is one of explosive growth. It's a big story. Currently, there's 1.73 billion people who interact monthly with social network globally, and that growth is going to continue. It's going to be more like 2.65 billion coming in 2017. That's about a third of global population.

What that means is that folks from developing nations are getting online, and the reality is is that the mobile phone has stepped in to fill the gap where fixed subscriptions to broadband are not available, and to sort of give you some numbers to articulate that, 23 percent of people in the "developed world" – rich countries – have fixed broadband subscriptions in their homes. That number in the developing world is six percent, and that number in sub-Saharan Africa is one percent. So, you can imagine in agricultural contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, which is the target of my project, FACET, that there's almost no fixed broadband subscriptions in rural areas where agriculture is being done. As a result, mobile phones have stepped into the gap, and what you'll see is that as mobile phones have stepped in, that device types have mattered more and more, and we'll get into that a little bit on the next slide.

The other big issue to highlight here from the very beginning is that there's dramatically different contexts for social media. In the rich, high bandwidth world, typically it's uncapped data, meaning that one monthly subscription fee provides much of people's data needs. We pay \$40.00 or \$50.00 or \$100.00 a month to get access that's relatively unlimited for our social media needs, but much of the world is dealing on a low-bandwidth scale, where it's either relatively expensive or it is capped, meaning that they buy phone cards to access the Internet, and, in those experiences, they're using social media in very

different ways. This includes chat apps, using text that's very low-data – it utilizes low data. Another phenomenon that's been observed pretty regularly in the developing world is consolidated Facebook use, where people are using Facebook for a variety of different tasks but, most frequently, for the chat app itself and to connect with their social networks. So, in essence, what it becomes is that Facebook is their experience with the Internet. They're not searching for rich video or other items on the Internet. One person's research that's been formative in creating that line of research, her name is Susan Wyche, and she teaches at Michigan State University. So, if you're interested in hearing more, you should look up her research.

So, why does social media matter in agricultural practice? It's a big question, and it can be answered in a variety of ways. But, to start with, social media matters, largely, everywhere. It's already a revolutionary communications channel in cities, and a new study that came out last month from GlobalWebIndex says that 57 percent of all global media consumption is on the Internet. Now, that's not in the future, that's today, so it's a remarkable number, and time on social media is already outpacing the time we spend watching TV. So, it matters today in cities; increasingly, it's going to matter in rural areas, as well, and that's all about the diffusion of mobile technology. We see a lot of places are going to skip over 3G entirely, especially if you're talking about South Asia and sub-Saharan African, where they didn't have the infrastructure to build out the initial generations of mobile networks. They're reaching deals now that will jump ahead _____ 4G technology I think probably sooner than we expect, but we will see how fast that comes along. Clearly, it's still a work in progress.

By 2017, approximately a third of the entire population of the world will be using social media tools every single month, so this wave is coming for us whether we like it or not, and the reality is is that people are going to use these tools in ways that suit themselves, so you're not going to be able to avoid it. The context for international development and for projects that I try to emphasize is that you need to think clearly about how users are going to talk about your project. International development faces more scrutiny than ever these days, and that conversation is going to happen whether you engage in it or not, so keep in mind that we're all publishers. We're all publishing our thoughts, and what that does is create this maelstrom of information that you sort of have to compete your way through, and that will be the sort of core of this talk today.

So, what are the barriers? Yes, it's a revolutionary channel. Yes, there's a lot happening on social media, and the reality is is that not everyone has access.

The biggest barrier that was emphasized by my colleague here on the webinar today, Michael Riggs, is language, and language, for example, in India, there's 350 languages in India. So, if you're trying to reach people over social media in that context, what are you going to do? Are you going to machine-translate your social media content into a bunch of different languages? Are you going to target specifically? Are people going to be interested once it is translated? Is it going to be just as relevant? That's a genuine question and a genuine barrier because, oftentimes, people are creating social media content on a hub and spoke model, where it's created in one central location and shared out, and, hopefully, if everything goes right, it goes viral and it jumps off of its own accord to wider audiences, but that becomes much harder if you're in a diverse language context.

Another big barrier is device type. So, we know that over 90 percent of the devices sold last year are Web-capable, and that's often cited as one of the statistics that just sort of feed the hype around social media, but you have to drill down to get a little deeper into the details here. The device types themselves, are they feature phones, are they smart phones, are they basic phones with Web capability that can only view text? Every single one of those types of phones has dramatic implications for how people actually use the device and what they use that device for. Our devices, you know, are you matching the capabilities of your device to what is actually affordable to your target audience? That's a consideration. Do your users know how to use the device once the time comes? That's a big question. To couple device type and tech fluency with language, illiteracy is not just a hurdle, it's a wall. We know something like 800 million people, according to UN estimates, are illiterate in their mother tongue, and it's very difficult to communicate via social media without some text-based functionality. While there are people doing icon-based social media, it's proven problematic. People interpret icons in different ways, and it's not there yet. We haven't figured out how to communicate with the illiterate over social media, so that is more of a wall than a hurdle at this point.

Connectivity. Farmers are pretty much out of reach today, and I think that's going to change fast, and that was much of the impetus for creating this handbook in the first place. But today, you're dealing mostly with agricultural practitioners, extension workers, international organizations, local partners over social media who have the connectivity, who are able to afford it, and are able to interact over social media in meaningful ways given their data situation. In terms of gender, gender is a major issue. There's one set of quantitative data out there that was produced last year by Intel towards the end of the year saying that women in sub-Saharan Africa have 45 percent less access to the

Internet than men, according to populations. This isn't a surprise. We know that women typically have less access to income-generating activities, we know that they often have less access to mobile phones, and, if they're getting the Internet via the mobile phone, primarily, or entirely, then of course they're going to have less access.

The point here is that you need to have gender-specific strategies to reach women if that is your target audience, and the economic divide manifests itself, as well. It's a very different experience on the social Internet between rich countries and poor countries for precisely the reasons that we've detailed here, that they're not data-rich applications, they're using chat apps instead, because those tools serve their needs better. So, your context is always something you really need to hone in on, and you need to spend a lot of time thinking through how your target audiences interact on the Internet. It's really the most important factor in whether your social media intervention is going to work or not.

Finally, I think, is a relatively new problem, that there is so much content being generated by social media that there's no space on people's newsfeeds for new information, that it's a dog-eat-dog world of content competition on the Internet, and this is really key. You're going to have to generate good content, not just some content. So, if you're copying and pasting from scientific documents, if you're generating content that isn't directly and immediately accessible and relevant to your audience, then you're really going to struggle on social media.

So, how are we using social media? I'd like to throw out a couple of poll questions here, and I'm curious to see the results of how this particular audience, all 125 of you, are using social media. Now, it's interesting. A lot of these are sort of – maybe it's because you're reading the first options first, but it's interesting how the results are sorting out sort of on this continuum from high to low. I'll give folks some more time to sort through these options. I like people's candor in admitting that they're entertained and distracted by social media in their personal life. I think that's a pretty relevant point, and I appreciate you being honest. Excellent. So, these options were largely generated right off the top of my head, and I think they reflect a large proportion of how social media is being used by agricultural projects in the professional column and in folks' personal life. By no means is it summarative of all these uses. Okay. By no means is this everything people do with social media, but it is a good collection of stuff that folks do.

Okay, so let's remove those polls and let me ask you a really basic question.

What is social media? I think these definitions get confused. So, let's just walk through my definition, and one definition. After doing a lot of research, I settled on something pretty general. The picture here is actually an Independence Day celebration with a bunch of friends of mine taking over Instagram, so it just makes me smile to see it. But social media, what we know is that it's online, okay? It's an online tool, or a collection of tools, including social networks, that are focused on two-way sharing between people, so it's a back-and-forth conversation. It's a collaboration. It is not a one-way broadcast or a monologue from project to people or person to a wider audience. What makes something social is precisely that, that there's a two-way communication happening.

The most important point is that social media gets better as more of your target audience joins in. I think this really separates it from something like SMS, which doesn't really have people congregate around specific issues, like you're not going to have folks subscribing to anything more than sort of a broadcasted SMS-central message. It gets very confusing very quickly when a bunch of people join in, and you don't necessarily know, like once you get beyond 20 people, who everyone is. I think it's not necessarily social, so yeah.

[Side Conversation]

To get back to my original thought, though, it gets better. What does better mean in this context? Better means more informative, better means more entertaining; better means more interesting than it was before as more of your target audience joins. I'd like to just present this quote. William Gibson is a science fiction author. He came up with the term cyberspace, he coined it, and he said to *The Economist* in 2003 that, "The future is already here; it's just not evenly distributed," and you hear that a lot in technology work, in information communications technology for development work. It's extremely cogent and relevant to social media today. Okay, so let's get into a couple of case studies.

So, the first one is USAID's FACET project, that is the project that I have worked for for the last year and four months. It is also a project that is wrapping up in a few days, and so I'm excited to be able to present some of the results from our efforts. It's a small knowledge sharing and technical assistance project. It focuses on ICTs – information and communication technology – in sub-Saharan Africa for agriculture, and we've done that in a variety of different ways, including producing toolkits that Zachary mentioned at the beginning of the talk, on low-cost video, interactive radio, and now the social media handbook. On social media, we created a very simple brand called ICT for Ag, instead of using the project name, and I think this is a really key point that often constrains what especially USAID projects can do online.

So, if you name something after your project name, your project name better be a pretty good acronym that describes specifically what you do immediately, like just calling something your project name to folks who live outside of one of the global capitals is going to have very little relevance unless they're a job hunter or they have very specific, usually scholarly interest in your work. So, instead of calling something the FACET project, which doesn't necessarily have an immediate cache among social media audiences, we picked something very simple, ICT for Ag. So, anyway, branding will always be a consideration. It's probably the most important thing that you can do early in your social media efforts to ensure that people will be at least vaguely interested in what you're doing. We used a variety of tools towards the goal of establishing thought leadership and providing a way to disseminate and connect with folks on FACET events, FACET partnerships, including the one that we did with Agrilinks, which was a very beneficial friendship in producing a bunch of multimedia content, in doing events, and in participating and collaborating over social media.

So, you're probably interested in results. After 14 months of our efforts on Facebook and Twitter, we built a pretty strong target audience for folks who were interested in information, technology, and agriculture. Almost 2,300 fans up on Facebook at this point, something right around 1,800 followers on Twitter, and we saw those results immediately after starting social media and thinking through our content clearly, which we had a huge cache of content, by the way, on our website, ICTforAg.org, that almost no one had seen. Because our website is a little creaky, and, yeah, while it was accessible via Google search, it wasn't quickly accessible to everyone, so we saw an immediate result from social media. In the first quarter afterwards, we had five times the downloads of our knowledge resources, and, for a knowledge-sharing project, that's obviously a win. We've achieved a high degree of influence, measured in our reports by Clout, which is proprietary and sort of a black box, but it is one measure of online influence, and we've been quite successful in cultivating that, and it helped us reach a much higher profile in sub-Saharan Africa with key partners and in global capitals. So, while it didn't help us reach farmers, and I should be very clear about that, I think it did help us reach a bunch of agricultural practitioners around the world. Let's do another case study that isn't directly connected to FACET in any way.

So, this one is on the Indian turmeric farmers of Maharashtra. This is an interesting story. So, there was a crash in turmeric prices in January of 2012 in the Sangli District because the market was flooded with turmeric. A local farmer there decided to connect his Facebook account to other local farmers. He sent 35 private messages telling folks to stay away from the next week's

auction and to boycott as a result of the price crash. Now, there's some question about whether he considered it unjust or not, I've seen different reports on that, but, regardless, turmeric is a major cash crop for these farmers in the Sangli District. It's one of the largest producers of turmeric in the world, this particular district, and the price crash had dramatic implications for their livelihoods. As a result, it went viral, so it reached 25,000 farmers within three days. Every single village in the district was aware of it, and, yeah, it continued to grow over the course of the next ten days, and I don't have access to my PowerPoint notes, so I'm gonna do this from sort of remembrance, but what ended up happening over the next ten days was interesting.

So, this particular farmer, Atul Salunkhe, he reinforced his message via Internet relay chat, which a lot of us in rich countries have forgotten. It's a forgotten technology. It was the predecessor to instant messaging, the Google Talks and the Yahoo Messengers of the world now, and while it's pretty clunky, it is very appropriate technology for this context, which is low bandwidth, and it's also quite easily secured via encryption. So, you're able to send messages over IRC and you're able to reach a wide audience who use it for their own purposes. That context, using the technology that's specific to that context, is really important, so that's really the moral of this story. As a result, after ten days, what happened was that the price of turmeric went up to previous levels, so the price crash was over; there were a number of results after that. This turmeric farmers group in the Sangli District established a formal Facebook group presence, where they communicate now with each other. The Indian Farmers Association created a new website that had all sorts of social media functionality, so other farmers groups in different districts could also communicate via social media, and they had that type of two-way functionality with their website, so it's an interesting story of organic use.

The next case study is one of what I call a named network. That means this network was created for a specific purpose and it was created from scratch by several international partners. It was dedicated to climate change adaptation for local communities in Africa. They use social media in ways internally to communicate with their broad group of 1,100 research members, of which 250 to 350 are active at any given time, and they also use it for outreach purposes. So, AfricaAdapt does a pretty good job of maintaining their Facebook groups. Their YouTube group has dozens and dozens of videos, maybe near 100 at this point, mostly taken at conferences, but they have done a very good job of creating systems, internally and externally, that enabled them to keep in touch on research. One way they did that was that they were having a terrible time trying to communicate via Skype, and so, as a result, they decided to use text-based chat where they could record transcripts with each other instead. To me,

that is, again, using the appropriate social media channel for your context, and, if you're targeting the developing world, oftentimes you're not creating rich video and imagery, necessarily.

So, why do projects engage in social media? I think the most common usage is information sharing, or as I saw our host, Zachary Baquet, ask on social media a few days ago, "Is dissemination a dead term?" Is it an inappropriate term, because it implies a one-way conversation. But, regardless, information sharing is today probably the most common activity on social media for projects.

Creating online communities in support of real-world activities is a major focus, and I would say that's mostly a complimentary activity, although increasingly that is growing in influence. Collaboration, transparency, and crowdsourcing, often internal social media platforms, things like Yammer are really good for that, and I think some of the Microsoft Office tools are pretty good for collaborative use, as well as Google Documents, that type of thing, and crowdsourcing can be compelling.

We see all sorts of mapping applications, especially using Google Maps, to crowdsource harassment in Egypt or to crowdsource agricultural diseases in a variety of different locations, so that is happening currently. But, in the future, I think social media will be critical for agricultural extension, augmented reality applications over smart phones as smart phones disperse, and I think towards the end of this decade they will be a dominant seller in the market just about everywhere. Augmented reality applications, where perhaps you can identify specific types of plants with the camera on your mobile phone, where you can get information from barcoded posters on specific diseases in the region, are going to become more popular. Social gaming, I would say no one has really figured it out yet for agriculture, but our friends at Total Agriculture I know have created a game that's online that I can imagine some social implications.

There's many other examples of people trying to do serious social games, and, so far, we're trying to figure it out but I don't think anyone has figured it out quite yet. Again, let me just emphasize you have to pick the right platform and tool.

So, in terms of content, there's five basic rules. You want to craft an authentic voice, and what do I mean in this context? Be yourself, be personal, be responsible, and, most importantly, be transparent and truthful because if you exaggerate on social media, you're going to be demolished quickly. You want to make sure that you're telling the truth and that you don't embarrass yourself or your project. You want to make sure that you're crafting content for your specific audience. That means framing it well, engaging people, using the right tools. You want to make sure that you're creating a conversation, you're not

just broadcasting your monologue, whether that just be cutting and copying research documents or – there's many ways in which people create a monologue rather than a conversation. You want to be quick, if you can, and I would caution here that a quick-and-wrong is not better than slow-and-right, so you want to be timely, you want to use hooks; if there's a news event that's relevant to the work that you're doing, you want to use it to your advantage.

I would also note, too, that a lot of shared events, you want to be careful of the content to make sure that it's appropriate for your social media channels because you don't want to look like you're exploitive, or they call it poverty porn when something bad happens and people use it to sort of get their name out there, and I agree. I think you grow to learn very quickly what is distasteful and what is not, and, also, you want to always sort of add value to the content that you share. Not everything, as you'll see in the next slide, not everything that you put in social media will be created by yourself. There's a process called curation, and you want to make sure you add value to someone else's content. So, perhaps it's a comment, perhaps it's just including it in your stream of original content that will provide a little more context for the user. So, let's introduce curation.

Most social – okay, Julie is advising me to wrap it up, so look up curation. It's how you create a reputation online. It's a way you become a trusted source. So, what you're doing is creating new content but also finding other content on the Internet that's relevant to your audience. Best practices add value. Make sure that you give credit to people; don't just take content and remove their name from it. That's a very bad habit on the Internet. You want to be very strategic and selective and mix it up. Analytics can also be very helpful in identifying whether you are succeeding _____ your social media activities. Every click is tracked. If you look in the social media handbook, I believe on page 130 there's a link to an updated list of analytic tools, I think 69 different analytic tools from an organization called DreamGrow, that can be very helpful in sort of giving you a full mix of analytic tools to work with, and, obviously, some are paid and some are free.

So, final thoughts, don't try to do everything at once. A lot of folks get pretty ambitious on social media, but you don't want to set up six platforms at once and try to become the monolith of social media. It's not going to work, it takes a lot of staff time to figure out all that content, and it's better to just invest in one thing and do it really well. You also want to make sure you're doing a landscape analysis, and there's a guide to do this in the social media handbook for the types of things to look for. But, in a nutshell, you want to know who the influencers are in your specific topic area, you want to know what your users,

what your target audience will be using – are they on their mobile phone, are they on Pinterest, for example – so there's a full guide on how to do that in the social media handbook. You also want to encourage experimentation. I think so many social media projects in international development are relentlessly conservative, and it becomes a major issue in terms of framing.

Social media by its very nature is more individual than previous forms of media, so you want to be able to talk in a personal voice, if possible, or in a more friendly voice than perhaps your other dissemination documents are communicating in, so empower your staff, allow your staff to do it well once they have the training to interact in social media well. You want to brand wisely. Again, we picked a simple brand. There's other ways to do it that are probably more clever, but we found that it worked really well for us. The best way to promote your social media channel is to be in person, to shake folks' hands. What you'll see on the right here is a flier that we created for an in-person event. We've done this in several different languages, and I just swap out the text for a new language and make sure that we have something physical to hand folks when we see them in person, so that's the situation. The social media handbook is at ICTforAg.org/social. You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook. Thanks. So, Julie, are we doing questions now?

Julie: Great. Thank you, Dustin. We had one question come in from Liz Caselli-Mechael from the Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation Project, and she was just wondering to what extent you vary content by the platform, you know, Facebook versus Twitter versus LinkedIn, et cetera. Do you share the same type of information on all of them, and is that outlined in the handbook?

Dustin Andres: Thanks for the question, Liz. Yes, it is outlined in the handbook. There's a bunch of different sort of platform previews for specific traits of 12 of the biggest platforms, and, also, there's some guides in sort of thinking through how to form your content for different social media channels, including a ton of links and free tools to do it well. But, in short, no, please don't post the same thing on every social media channel. It's an abuse of the system, it will get you filtered out of your users' feeds because the social media platforms themselves know that the most compelling content is created for their sites specifically, and they have these very complicated algorithms that decide who gets displayed and who doesn't, and it's all based on user interest. So, if you're posting something on Facebook, make sure that you create it for Facebook, or at least adapt it well for Facebook, et cetera. That would be my short answer.

Julie: Great, and then I think one more clarification question. Nicoletta DeTono asks if the landscape analysis is explained more in depth in the handbook.

Dustin Andres: It is, and it gives some basic ideas of what to look for in landscape analysis, so yes, it is.

Julie: Great. Well, we've had a lot of great conversation in the chat box, folks sharing resources and examples of how they've seen social media used, so we think that will continue and we'll open up for some more questions at the end for you, Dustin, and for Michael. But, I think right now we should go ahead and go right into Michael's part of the presentation. So, Michael, please feel free to un-mute yourself and take it away.

Michael Riggs: Okay, I think I'm un-muted. Hello, everyone. Good afternoon from Rome. I'm very glad to be here. I work for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, also known as FAO. We work globally in agricultural development projects [*break in audio*] called the e-Agriculture Community, and how we use social media for this community. I think it's important [*break in audio*] in this particular example to get a little background on what the community is and what it's all about, and so e-Agriculture, as I said, it's a Community of Practice, and it's a group of people who come together to network with each other and exchange information and communicate about the use of ICTs, ICTs being information and communication technologies, for agriculture, natural resource management, and food security. So, this is a very focused topic, and I think that's an important issue that will come up later in the discussion.

So, I just wanted to do a quick question survey to see how many people out there actually know about e-Agriculture, so if you'll just pop up there and answer the poll that just popped up. As I said, we are a global Community of Practice. The community was actually established in 2006 – and good, this is a great opportunity to publicize the community. So, the community was originally established in 2006 by a group of international and regional organizations that were all interested in the subject I just mentioned, which is the use of ICTs in agricultural development. So, we can end the poll and move on to the next slide. These are the founding partners of e-Agriculture. People will recognize several of the names. These organizations are all still around, they all still support e-Agriculture Community and they interact with it in different ways depending on the needs of their programs. FAO, my employer, provides a secretariat and facilitation function for this community.

So, these are the organizations that founded it. These organizations have resources. We meet together face to face from time to time. We're able to travel to conferences. But what I can tell you e-Agriculture is today, it's a community of individuals, and it's actually a community of more than 10,000 people. So, how on earth could we ever reach 10,000 people and allow these

people to network and work together? There's no way it's possible to interact on a one-on-one basis, let alone a face-to-face basis, and, also, our job is to facilitate interaction and communication, not just for me to talk to them or for my organization to talk to them. So, what we were looking for were communication tools, essentially, and, initially in 2005, it was the Internet and basically websites. But, as you can see, we've grown to about 80 percent of our 10,000 members are in developing countries, and they come from a broad section of areas, so we have a pretty broad content group to reach out to.

This community provides them with an information opportunity, as I said, to share, create and share information, as well as network with each other, so this gives you some ideas of the type of content that are shared, and this is content just on the website, okay? We're not talking yet still about social media, per se, other than the blog and the interactive sections on the website. We also bring people to the website to discuss issues, so we reach out to more than 50,000 people, some of the people repeatedly, of course, over a five-year period to discuss topical issues, so we're crowdsourcing, okay? So, now let's get into specifically social media and what we're doing with this community.

So, as I mentioned, we have a website, e-agriculture.org, but we also have developed a social media presence over time, and I've listed the different social media channels on this web page, starting with Delicious, from the earliest social media channels we established in around 2006, we then set up a YouTube channel. In 2007, we set up Twitter, and then after that came LinkedIn, eventually SlideShare, a Facebook page, and, most recently, a Google Plus account. The other thing that you'll see in this page are the words that are in dark letters, like Twitter, and the words in lighter letters, like Delicious. Delicious, YouTube, and SlideShare, I'll tell you now, we mainly use for content management, not social purposes. For us, the real social areas are Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google Plus, and Google Plus is the newest and it's still an experiment for us.

So, what are we looking to do with these social media channels? We're looking, overall, to mobilize content and help people connect, connect with us in my organization, but also to connect with each other, because we're dealing with a specific topic that's of interest to a wide group of practitioners around the world, so we want to raise awareness about the work each of us are doing, we want to increase traffic to our website, the community's website. This is something we're very honest about. It's the main source of content that we have it's to exchange news and information in a timely manner, it's to crowdsource on very specific topics where we are asking questions and seeking answers to development challenges, and, as Dustin mentioned in his

presentation, we're really looking to push this from what was a more traditional one-way flow of information to what we here at my team like to call geometric engagement, and all this is a really fancy term for saying instead of me talking just to one person and that person talking back to me, social media allows us to provide information that's available to several people, and some of those people may be able to share it or build on it in an interaction with people that I don't know and, eventually, some of that may come back to me. So, what we're developing is a network of communication that results in much more complex interactions that we couldn't have had before, okay?

So, we're using social media in many different ways. Again, just to get a curiosity, those of us who do know about e-Agriculture, what channels that we have are you currently using or do you find useful? We're curious to know. I'm guessing that Twitter is going to be high. I think events like this one are highly slighted towards people who use Twitter. It's a major source we find in driving people to our site and also to online events. Okay, and what I'm seeing here pretty much reflects a slide I showed you earlier, so we're getting responses on people interacting with us through Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, and, as I said, these are where we concentrate our efforts currently in social media channels. Most of the other channels are really for content management for us, and so I'll go on to talk more now about why we've selected some of the different channels that we have.

So, here you see a graph of sort of our experience with social media over the last six or seven years. The blue line is our registrations on our community Web platform, so starting in 2007, this platform was made available. Our very first member registered in September of that year, and we are currently at about 10,500 registered members today, so this is our major point of social interaction, in fact. We have a blog, we have online discussion boards, in addition to just the posting of information. In 2008, I created a Twitter account, @e_agriculture for e-Agriculture, so you'll see the growth of our followers on Twitter. Pretty slow at first. To be very honest, not everybody in my organization was convinced that I knew what I was doing when I did it, and I'm not really sure I did, either, but I think you'll see we've had pretty good results.

We've now got more than 16,000 followers on Twitter, and then Facebook, I've charted Facebook "likes" in the green line for our Facebook page, which we launched in June of 2010, and you'll see we've had a pretty steady growth _____ we've passed 3,000 "likes" just recently. Now, I think that this graph is telling in a couple ways, which we can discuss more in questions if people want, but the main thing is you'll notice that registration growth and "likes" on Facebook, the blue and the green lines, have grown pretty consistently over

time, these two. They're pretty much straight-line growth, whereas the Twitter growth curve, the orange one, is _____, and I think this tells us something about these social media channels and how they function, and I think it's important to observe these growth patterns because it also impacts how we communicate on them.

So, as I mentioned earlier, social media is important for driving traffic to us. Our main point of communication is still our website. Social media is what comes under the topic of referrals in the blue here. It drives about a third of our traffic to our website every month, and this number ranges from 20 to 40 percent. It's varied more frequently in the past, but recently we're pretty settled in at about 33 percent, so this is significant. It's also important to us because it's where we have the most direct influence. We don't claim to have much influence over search engines. You'll see that 50 percent of our traffic comes from search engines, this is excellent, but it just happens, okay? Social media we have a lot of influence over how we communicate and what's going to happen there.

So, of this one-third of people who come to us from social media referrals, this is how social media referrals break down for us. You'll see Twitter and Facebook are by far the most predominant but, in fact, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, the ICT for Ag program are also quite important to us, and then something that I'm sure may come up in the questions, but this big brown area on the left, what comes up as "other," this is something that we've only seen recently. It's about 40 to 45 percent every month of our traffic is driven by something that Google Analytics classifies as "other," and I still don't have good insight into what "other" actually is because it didn't used to be this big. There was a big jump in what was qualified as "other" when Google Analytics changed last March.

So, again, these are some of the tools that we use, how we communicate our messages to let people know that the community exists, but also that the website is out there and that they can interact with people. I don't want to, though, overwhelm the fact that there are people behind all these tools. Communication is still a human process. I'm very grateful to these people here who work with me, but also to give you an idea, if you're trying to strategize on what sort of resources you'll need, you should know that I have three colleagues who work with me in various degrees. Andrea Jimenez, who works here at FAO with me, she works full-time on e-Agriculture, not just social media, she works on other aspects, as well, but she's full-time. I'm sort of the senior person on the team. I don't work full-time on it, but most of my time, and then we have two volunteers. They dedicate time particularly to source content from Africa and in French for us, and that would be Darlene and _____, and they volunteer their time for us, which is a very important part of our work.

A quick slide just on how we've scaled our use of social media and how we monitor the work we're doing. As I mentioned, we use Google Analytics. This is the essential tool for us to track social media's impact on our community's website and the interaction we get with the Web platform. We also subscribe to HootSuite Pro. We use it to program some of our social media, particularly Twitter. It also facilitates teamwork, because our team is not all geographically located in the same place. We use a tool called Bitly to track links and how they function, and, to a much lesser degree, we also use the free analytics with Facebook and LinkedIn specifically for those tools. The only thing here that we pay for is HootSuite Pro, and it costs \$10.00 a month. I have access to people's time, but the budget for managing e-Agriculture is actually very small, so to do what we've accomplished, we've not used a lot of money but we absolutely have used time.

All right, the last three slides to go through this, a lot of text, but I did this for people who look after the fact, some of the lessons we've learned and things you may want to discuss in questions. Be strategic in your approach to social media. You wouldn't physically try meeting everybody in a room all at once, and don't try and communicate in the same way. Choose between the channels you work in and where you focus. I've listed the three main channels for the moment for e-Agriculture and how they're different for us, and I'm not going to go into that now, but they are different and we've learned this over time, and we approach them differently as a result. So, you should choose your social media channels as a function of many things. It's the resources you have available, both time and money, who your target audience is, where they're located, what languages they use, what sort of content you have. This is often, I think, overlooked but it's really important. You need images to work in Facebook. It doesn't work well otherwise. Pinterest, we don't touch it, and there's a reason for that; it's because it's fully image-based. You'll also use different channels for the type of social interaction you'd like.

Content, this relates to a question that was asked after Dustin's talk. We don't post everything that comes up as news on our website into all social media channels. We would overwhelm it otherwise. The subject matter is always about our field of ICTs and agriculture, but we customize the content to different channels. There's content for Facebook; it's not the same as content for Twitter. I think re-posting information automatically through these different channels is a mistake. If you don't have the resources to make the appropriate content for each, you should probably reduce the number of channels you use.

Monitoring and getting feedback, here I find that we can talk really a lot about

this but, in practice, most of us don't have that much money. I'm talking about the groups that are working from perspective of field practitioners, people working on programs. Most of us don't have communications budgets, per se, so there becomes a real dichotomy in social media between what is actually available and what we really want to know and what's useful, and what we want to know is important, but also what our management wants to know is important. I, in fact, don't need to generate very much data to satisfy my management, and this is a critical factor. I could purchase much more than we would really find useful.

As a last point, I just want to throw out an idea that's been important in my professional experience. Social media is great. As Dustin mentioned, most of us use it personally, as well as professionally, but most of my social media is actually a sandbox, and this is an American term maybe, but a sandbox is a place to play or a place to test things out. I now use it to test out professional things, as well as personal communications, and, from the experience I develop on my own in my personal accounts, where I have much less risk than I would in, say, the e-Agriculture account, I can use that experience to fine tune my communication processes, for e-Agriculture or when I'm advising other people in FAO on how to use their own project accounts. Okay, and with that, thanks for listening, and I'm ready for questions.

Julie: Great, thank you so much, Michael. Michael and Dustin, please feel free to keep your microphone opens. To let you all know online, we're all joining from different locations, so we shouldn't have any feedback and should be able to all kind of speak back and forth during this Q&A period. So, Dustin, if you happen to see anything in the chat box that you want to address, or Michael, at any point, please feel free to jump in. I've been trying to keep track. We've had such a great conversation stream in this chat box. It's been a little bit challenging to keep track of all the questions, but –

Michael Riggs: Yeah, Julie, there's been a lot that's gone by. If people have questions, they might want to repeat them.

Julie: – that's a good point, Michael. If you find that your question was a long time ago and would like to make sure it's raised, please feel free to enter it into the chat box again, and also remind us what country you're joining from and what organization you're with. But, Dustin, Aaron Buchsbaum from the SPRING Project had asked about your thoughts on the tension between when to start a Community of Practice versus when a landscape analysis of similar efforts shows it's better to attach to something else. I don't know if you had any comments on that.

Dustin Andres: Yeah, and I noted a little bit in the text box itself, but that tension is very real, and I think it's born of dealing with two separate audiences. One is typically the folks you write proposals for and who want a Community of Practice, and the other is your users and where they already live, because if we know anything about user behavior, we know people do not like new logins, they sort of learn and grow to new channels slowly, it takes some time to get some run-up and some speed. As Michael's e-Agriculture stats noted, they took off in the third year. So, that tension isn't going away, and what I would say is that most of the time you're better off meeting your users where they're at instead of creating new communities of practice, if that's Web-based or if that's some cloud chat function. That would be my typical bias, is that it's better to deal with users where they already are, but there are exceptions to that rule, too, and I think if you do it really well then you can justify doing some other way.

Julie: Great, thank you, Dustin. Michael actually flagged a question for me in our *[break in audio]* and I was hoping that perhaps you could both touch upon kind of the realities of what folks in organizations need to do in terms of how many platforms it's reasonable to keep an eye on, how many people you need focusing on each platform, and how often you should post on each platform that you're checking in with.

Michael Riggs: Yeah, thanks, Julie. Maybe I'll start with this one. In terms of how many people are working, so I showed you there were four people involved in the day-to-day management of the e-Agriculture Community, but only two of us work on social media. That's myself and Andrea, and between us, we divide different channels because, as I said, I think it's important to focus on a channel so that you can react to it properly, and so that you provide the right type of content for each channel. Twitter and Facebook, in our case, are our two most important channels. They're also very, very different in many ways that I won't go into because we'll use up too much time, but I think it's important to keep that in mind. Those two channels alone take up a significant amount of time.

In terms of rules of thumb for organizing posts and how often, Facebook, you should limit yourself. I've been in big debates about this. People say anywhere from one to five a day. In our case, we have a global audience, we know that we have people looking in Facebook at different times and there are different peak periods based on language. So, for example, we tend to post in English early afternoon Europe time, we post in Spanish late night Europe time, which is midday Latin America time, for example, and we regularly don't post more than three a day. Facebook is much more of a free or all. It's much more timely, and I'm not sure you can post too much, one in every two hours, even once an hour I think is fine.

Dustin Andres: Yeah, and I differ from Michael on this but I think our audiences are very different in that most of my Facebook audience, for example, is in Africa and we've had a pretty dramatic drop-off in Facebook interactivity after September 2012. If you do a Web search on Facebook and changes in September 2012, a lot of folks who are in this line of work were upset about it because, essentially, it's a noisy system, Facebook, and they're making you pay to promote your posts through the clutter. So, previously, we used to access a lot of our audience with each post, and that is probably, on a consistent basis, non-promoted is probably *[break in audio]* a fifth of what it used to be. So, as a result, I've invested less of my time in Facebook and more in Twitter because it's more useful, but every single platform is different. Anyway, I forgot the original question, but hopefully that _____.

Julie: Yeah, that's great.

Michael Riggs: Julie, can I jump in just quickly? Nicoletta asked a related question about multiple languages, and so I wanted to answer that in the case of e-Agriculture, we work in three languages – English, French, and Spanish – and why is that? Some part of it is a United Nations issue, but part of it also is because we know there are major groups of development practitioners that don't work in English. As Dustin mentioned in the very beginning, to me, language is one of the greatest restrictions we have. I'm fluent in a language that we don't even post in, but we can't manage all these resources. So, we're trying to target different practitioner groups, but large practitioner groups with these different languages.

Julie: Thank you, Michael. An interesting question, a timely question that I think many people want to ask is coming in from Samir a little ways up, who asked, "I think we generally recognize how powerful social media can be to reach different audiences, but I would like to know how we actually measure its impact. What do we want to concretely achieve, besides disseminating and sharing?" If you wouldn't mind just quickly touching on that.

Dustin Andres: I'll step in and say, first, I'll sort of throw the ball back at Michael because in terms of impact, I mean I think the entire international development population is trying to figure out how to measure impact and is trying to improve at that, and just like any sort of behavior change work, it's really hard to actually prove impact, and one advantage of social media is that you get to see if your item gets in someone's feed, you get that data. If someone clicks on your stuff, you get that data. But you don't actually know if they did anything with it or if they've changed your life, changed their own sort of behaviors or habits or life.

So, one thing I would say is that you need to factor in qualitative information into this mix, and this is one thing that Agrilinks has emphasized with me. In their particular case study, they are one of the case studies in the social media handbook, Lindsey Levin shared with us that they do focus groups at professional events. They sort of bribe folks with a small item, perhaps it's a piece of pizza, et cetera, and ask their core users are they getting what they need from the work that Agrilinks is doing. We've never done that type of focus group, aside from some Web polls and stuff like SurveyMonkey, but the in-person focus group continuing, looking forward for my next sort of social media endeavor, I will definitely be planning for that.

Michael Riggs: The only thing I would add is I think sometimes there's a question of what do we mean when we say impact. Depending on your project or the circumstances under which you're using social media, you'll be measuring different things. So, in the case of e-Agriculture, as I mentioned, a major goal of ours is to network people who are working in this field we work in, ICTs for agricultural development, and to improve the collective work of this community. So, we measure it with qualitative studies, we interview people, we produce videos – sometimes we post them, sometimes they're used just internally – and then we also, from the data that we produce, we make an assumption that people wouldn't continue to interact with the community if they didn't find the information exchange valuable, and I wouldn't underestimate just the exchange of information as an impact itself.

Julie: Great, thank you, Michael. We have time for a few more questions. I think we officially advertised the webinar ending at 10:45, but we'll stick around for a little bit longer to answer some of the questions in the chat box. Andrea Fonseka has a question. She's from Texas A&M University, and she asks, "Mr. Riggs, on e-Agriculture, what would you say is the most important type of information you share and communicate with your readers? Is it [break in audio] accomplishments, research, events? What's the most successful?"

Michael Riggs: Okay. Good question, Andrea. I'll give you, first off, a content type and then maybe we can talk quickly about subjects. In terms of content types, so as I mentioned, we have news and events and we have what we call knowledge-based resources, but the most important and popular are two things: the online discussions that we hold, we hold these discussion forums, our asynchronous discussions that go on for two weeks, and, out of each one of those, we write a summary, which is known as a policy brief if you look for those on the site. Those are the most popular things. I think it's because they're actually information or knowledge that the community itself creates, so this is our crowdsourcing of what works, what isn't working, and how we might address

the challenges we have.

So, these are really popular, and they're heavily downloaded online. We also print them and distribute them. Then, in terms of subject matter in the ICT for Agriculture field, it changes over time. Three years ago, all you had to do was say mobile and everybody jumped. Now we get a lot of requests for information on things like traceability and pest and disease monitoring. We actually don't have a lot of information on those, which is part of the reason I think people have suddenly realized there's a need to work in this area.

Julie: Thank you, Michael. I thought an interesting point was brought up by Veronica Letelier from Engility here in D.C. regarding content competition. That's something I hadn't thought much about before, but I was wondering if either of you had some lessons learned about how to win attention for the content you are sharing, or if you've ever felt competition with similar platforms.

Dustin Andres: I'll field that one. So, I mean I think there's an extremely short answer and then there's like an epic, handbook-sized answer for this, but the short answer is that you just need to be as relevant as possible, and you'll notice characteristics about your audience that are specific – if they're young, if they're urban, if they're rural – and you need to cater your framing and your voice to that audience specifically. One trick that I think is particularly compelling comes from the people at the Facebook page Upworthy, where, for their posts, they don't allow anyone to publish anything via their channels, and they have a million "likes" they've created in 14 months, and they actually have a very helpful content competition SlideShare. If you Google Upworthy and content competition, they've got several there. There's one in particular that came out in June of last year that's really terrific that you should look for. But one of their tricks is that their writers have to compose 25 headlines for every post, and, inevitably, they get a lot of junk headlines but they never know what's going to test well. In terms of content competition, you can do a lot of very simple AB testing and they do go through the steps on how to do that without any fancy tools in that particular SlideShare. So, again, Upworthy and go check out their SlideShare, and that will give you a little more.

Julie: Michael, I didn't know if you had any additional comments in that regard.

Michael Riggs: I was sort of laughing at the beginning because I think that one of the advantages of having gotten started early is we had more time to establish a brand, and I think that social media, though, doesn't provide as much competition as it does actually opportunities to collaborate.

Julie: Yes, I agree –

Dustin Andres: That's very diplomatic –

Julie: – _____.

Dustin Andres: – of you.

[Laughter]

I'm impressed, Michael. I think you're right. I'm just giving you a hard time. But I do believe you're right, yes.

Michael Riggs: If it wasn't for social media, I wouldn't be here, right?

Dustin Andres: Fair enough.

Julie: If anyone else has any final questions coming in for Michael or Dustin, or just general comments or resources you'd like to share in the chat box, please go ahead and do so. Just, in the meantime, I'd like to remind people that you can download today's slides or the social media handbook in the File Downloads box on your screen. They'll also be posted on Agrilinks, and we will get the recording of this event up on Agrilinks shortly so that you can keep access to all of those resources in the chat box. If you joined the webinar today, you will receive an e-mail letting you know when any post-event resources are available, and please do take our quick survey link if you have the chance. The survey that's on the slide right there helps us improve these events for the future, and, just to let you know, our next Ag Sector Council is scheduled for October 30th, and we'll be focusing on some good examples of scaling up technologies, so you'll get more information about that soon. But, Michael and Dustin, I don't know if you saw anything in the chat box that you would like to make a comment on or if you have any final comments you'd like to throw out there. There have been a lot of questions. If we missed any, we'll be sure to get to them.

Michael Riggs: Julie, I saw a question _____, or a discussion maybe about hashtags, and I've got to throw in my own two cents on this. When you're using social media, no matter what platform it is, before you make up a hashtag, look for a hashtag that exists. The purpose of hashtags is to increase the exposure of your information, and you're only going to get that if you're using shared hashtags. There's no purpose in proprietary hashtags, and people won't agree with me on this, I know, whether anybody here will say this or not, but I promise you people don't agree but I think this is really important.

Julie: I think that's a really interesting point. You certainly do see wide ranges of hashtags, from things that are very general and likely to be shared, to things that are very event-specific for maybe a single conference or a single, small paper, and so I agree that there is a lot of kind of dissent on what's the best approach, so I appreciate your comments there.

Dustin Andres: So, just to clarify on that, Michael, I have a question for you. So, do you feel like event-specific hashtags are sort of proprietary and don't serve a purpose?

Michael Riggs: I'm not fond of them. I think that if you have enough – if the event is big enough, such that you're going to generate a lot of social media activity around the event, but really a lot, _____ you're worried about swapping out an existing hashtag, then maybe you would use one, proprietary. But, otherwise, why? Why would you cordon information off into a – because hashtags sort of put a box around things, is one way of looking at it, and so why wouldn't you use a bigger box? There's an issue of specificity, I understand that. Do you use ICT for Ag, or do you use M for Ag if you're only interested in mobile? There's a choice there. But should you create something that's unique to a meeting that's happening on mobiles in agriculture? If it's a two-day meeting, why would you create a hashtag just about that, because then you have to promote the hashtag so that other people will know it. I'm not going to find a proprietary hashtag _____.

Dustin Andres: Well, I found it very helpful at specific two-, three-day events, where people want a way of connecting with other people at the conference, right? So, it serves that purpose of being this sort of not-so-closed, internal social networking tool. So, I appreciate that hashtags themselves a) they're ugly, they don't look good in tweets, you should only use them –

Michael Riggs: They're even uglier on Facebook.

Dustin Andres: – that's true. But you should only use them if people are using them, I get that part, but I think the size of audience is less relevant, necessarily, than the commitment of the audience that are using that hashtag. If the audience is committed to it, then it's a non-issue, as far as I'm concerned.

Julie: All right, so I think maybe one final question, just a little bit of a question about empowerment that came in recently. Cindy Hernandez asks, "If I don't have a team or a community manager, can my institution handle a social media initiative for Facebook and Twitter?" Do you have any words of encouragement in that regard?

Dustin Andres: Michael, do you want to field that?

Michael Riggs: Oh, thank you. Sure. *[Laughter]* Yeah, Cindy, my answer is yes, but it's a qualified yes because then your use of social media somehow has to be scaled to who is going to use it. That's not making sense, is it? Well, what I mean to say is you don't have to have a dedicated person for social media, but you have to have a person or a couple people who you know will maintain and monitor these social media accounts, and there has to be awareness within the institution of this because if somebody is going to leave the organization or no longer maintain interaction in social media, somebody else needs to pick it up. It is an investment, and this is an organizational question: is the organization ready to devote some time to it? Lots of us got started out by sort of doing this, as I said, in personal accounts on the side. I chatter about my own work because I love what I do, but what's being done for e-Agriculture, there's a commitment there, and I think that's important.

Dustin Andres: I would note, too, that it helps so much to have someone own the project, even if that ownership is marginal, just someone who's responsible for some basic standards, because I think if this is just an add-on to a team's work, I think it's an add-on that often gets lost, and your performance will suffer in terms of creating an audience and being able to claim that it made a difference in your work. So, yeah, I think if you're not going to have a specific person to have time allotted for social media, that's okay as long as someone is responsible for quality control, at least at a marginal level. If not, then I think you probably could still do it fine, as long as you have a group of collaborators that are interested in it and you scale back your expectations a little bit.

Julie: All right. Well, we are coming up on the 11:00 hour here in D.C., so I think it's a good time to wrap up, but thank you all so much for joining, and thanks so much to Dustin and Michael, and also to Zachary for giving our introduction. You really I think gave some outstanding presentations and great examples, and I get the feeling that this conversation is not over. I think a lot of new Twitter handles were followed today, and it's great to have this community where we can keep talking about social media. So, thank you all so much, and we will –

[End of Audio]