

The Sea Grant Files
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Social Media and Minnesota Sea Grant

The Sea Grant Files: Fresh news about fresh water.

Jesse: Hi, I'm Jesse Schomberg and you're listening to the Sea Grant Files. Annika Whitcomb, a soon-to-be graduate in Environmental Science at the University of Minnesota Duluth, is here with me in the studio. Annika works as a communications assistant at Minnesota Sea Grant and is here to talk about how science is being conveyed over social media platforms. Thanks for being a part of the Sea Grant Files, Annika.

Annika: Thanks for having me Jesse!!

Jesse: So, Annika, tell us about your work at Minnesota Sea Grant.

Annika: Sure, I got involved with Minnesota Sea Grant just under a year ago to acquire job experience related to science. Before that, I was a barista. Before joining Sea Grant I was unaware of how important communication is in the realm of science. I'm now in charge of Minnesota Sea Grant's Twitter and Facebook presence and helping out with other communications projects.

Jesse: How do you, as a communicator for Sea Grant, display science on social media?

Annika: Minnesota Sea Grant uses three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I look after Facebook and Twitter while Summer Harris runs the Instagram account. I've learned that by understanding the strength of each social media platform and how different audiences are using them, I can display information in a way that resonates with our followers and makes sense to them. Social media is all about creating content compelling enough that users will share it with their social media networks. We want followers on Twitter or Instagram, but even more than followers, we want people to engage with the content...to share it, to click on the link, to comment or even simply to "like" our post. To do that we need people to be interested in our posts. However, science can be tricky, because social media only allows for so much space, and I don't know about you reading scientific journals but to me they tend to be lengthy and kinda dry. So on Facebook, Minnesota Sea Grant displays information ranging from topics on water quality to climate change patterns to knowing when it's safe to swim at Park Point Beach, which I am sure you are very familiar with! By providing a post with information on, say a rip current, along with a link to our website more information can be provided to a given reader. Twitter is also a great place to skim through the latest science news and special interest topics that are happening. Instagram is another useful platform Minnesota Sea Grant uses, displaying pictures correlated to relevant science. We are currently using it as a fast track to science, providing quick fun facts regarding the Great Lakes Region.

Jesse: You push information out through Minnesota Sea Grant's social media platforms but let's flip the equation where do you go to keep up with current scientific information?

Annika: That's a really good question. There are so many sources for information on social media and weeding through all that information to reach the credible "good stuff"

can be kind of tricky. I stick to information provided through agencies and organizations that Minnesota Sea Grant commonly partners with, mainly government and academic sources are The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also known as NOAA The Environmental Protection Agency also known as the Epa and The University of Minnesota Twin Cities' and Duluth's research arms I also like looking at information being offered by Climate Central – an organization of lead scientists and journalists reporting climate facts. And then, I don't want to forget the other 32 Sea Grant Programs in the Sea Grant Network! By following these organizations on I can see what research is being conducted, what conferences will be/ are occurring, and what topics hold the center of attention within a given week.

Jesse: How do you think social media is valuable for communicating scientific information. What's the use, how good of a medium is social media for trying to communicate this kind of information.

Annika: I think it's really important and I think it is a good form getting used today. Everybody's on their phones, their laptops. Everybody's connected in some sort of way with social media and so by presenting scientific information which people might not research on their own but having it available on social media. I think is really important because it is presenting little tidbits of facts to them constantly, and frequently and it's readily available. The information isn't an overwhelming science journal. It's transformed in a way that is readable and is understandable to all forms of public

Jesse: There's a lot of details in some of that in depth scientific work. Methods and results and all sorts of thing which is good to know. You know it's important for a lot of folks. So it seems to me what you are kind of saying is, we are able to pull out kind of those salient pieces and you know folks are interested in more of that information more of those details. You can always go get that.

Annika: Right

Jesse : But we can let them know that this information is out there.

Annika: Right, it's a really good starting point.

Jesse: Who else does MN Sea Grant staff follow on Social Media?

Annika: Minnesota Sea Grant staff have told me they like following Dr. Solomon David, a Research Scientist at the U.S. Geological Survey Great Lakes Science Center; Titus Seilheimer, an Aquatic Ecologist and Fisheries Specialist with Wisconsin Sea Grant; and Cool Green Science, comprised of 600 scientists working to solve some of conservation's largest challenges. Using clever phrases and explanatory pictures, they make science fun over social media.

Annika: Do you follow any scientific sources on social media that you enjoy following Jesse?

Jesse: Ha, there's a few. You know what I mostly focus on the content that they are sharing and not always on who's sharing it. Eventually I'll look at that but you know you see a lot of stuff and it just keeps going. I mostly look at Twitter for this kind of thing. I'm not so much of a facebook user. I'm not an Instagram person. Hakai magazine is one

that I think is really interesting. They are out of British Columbia and they focus kind of on the intersection between science and culture and I just found some of their stuff really interesting. They have some nice graphics and other things. I also look at oh there's a number of different NOAA sites that have Twitter feeds. A lot of them will come out every month about updated climate summaries for the last month. Was it warmer than normal? Was it wetter than normal? Was it drier than normal? Whatever it was and some of the yearly summaries at the end of the year. So I find some of that kind of interesting. Other people might find that quite boring. I don't know and then Extension has one that I really like. I have a little woodland at my house and there's a MyMNWoods feed that has a lot of good information on forestry practices and it'll have information on emerald ash borer and different pests or the right time to do certain things or a variety of other things. It's an interesting one I think.

Annika: Neat

Jesse: Do you think there is a best way to display scientific information; a way that makes most sense to readers?

Annika: Actually my writing class actually just watched a TED Talks video called The Beauty of Data Visualization by David McCandless. Mr. McCandless explains the fascinating reality of finding trends within data and making those trends into visuals. The key, he explains, is not to lose the context of the information. Which I find really important. On social media, infographics and pictures are often what readers typically see first. Then the text second. So being able to display the information in a visual while keeping the context of that information, I think is really key for social media. I think it is really important that images and text are displayed in a way that provides the wholesome picture without manipulating the context of that information.

Jesse: Here's your chance to make a plug, why should people follow Minnesota Sea Grant on Social Media?

Annika: Following Minnesota Sea Grant on social media is a quick and easy way to peruse the latest news and research results about Lake Superior, Minnesota's water resources and related News around the Great Lakes region. I invite you to join me and MN Sea Grant on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram with our username @MNSeaGrant. Hashtag Lake Superior hashtag awesome.

Jesse : Hashtag awesome, This hashtag awesome episode of the Sea Grant Files was produced by Annika Whitcomb, Mariah Schumacher, Maija Jenson, KUMD, and me, Jesse Schomberg. To listen to more episodes of The Sea Grant Files and to subscribe to our podcast, visit the Minnesota Sea Grant website at www.seagrant.umn.edu. You can also follow Minnesota Sea Grant on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Thanks for listening.