



# CS360 ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS

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## *WHY ONLINE COMMUNICATION IS CRITICAL*

Today's communities demand increased transparency and engagement from their police department. The social media age has created an environment where departments must keep up with new technologies and learn how to use them effectively. Many of the challenges facing the policing profession today, from mass protests to recruitment and morale, stem from social media activity and online conversations that often happen without police input. Moreover, many police departments do not prioritize public information disclosure, as is the nature of investigative work. Community outreach with an online component can be daunting for a department with limited resources and competing priorities.

Tools such as CS360 allow community members to participate in identifying problems and implementing solutions alongside the police department. Implementing CS360 is only part of the process. Agencies must convey the information and work being done with the community to the rest of the general public that may not be actively participating in the process.

## *HOW ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS CAN ENHANCE CS360*

Creating social media accounts is a crucial step toward creating an effective CS360 communication footprint, but these accounts can't just be active; they need to be effective. Some steps can be taken to increase the reach of your agency's messages to the community:

- 01 *SELECT SOMEONE TO SERVE AS A PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER (PIO) OR DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER (DCO).*** While many departments do not have a full-time PIO or communications officer, a sworn or non-sworn member can be designated to oversee the communication strategy. This person needs to have aptitude and interest in the job to be successful, and they must receive suitable training in communications, as they will be a public face for the department.
- 02 *IDENTIFY CORE MESSAGES.*** Each agency has its own unique culture, concerns, and audience. It is essential to identify core messages to address what the department wants to showcase and what the community is interested in knowing. For example, if the department uses the CS360 model to address traffic fatalities, it should strive to put out crime prevention information to raise awareness of safety measures the community can take. If the agency hears that the community wants more transparency

from the officers, it should strive to post updates about critical incidents and answer community questions to the extent possible.

- 03** **SHARE EASY-TO-CONSUME INFORMATION.** Most social media information is seen on a mobile device, and users scroll among different topics competing for their attention. It is important that information shared be relatively short, simple to comprehend, and easy to share. For example, when inviting people to a CS360 or community meeting, try to create a post or image that clearly conveys all the relevant information instead of only posting a link, which puts the responsibility on the viewer to click to learn more.
  
- 04** **UPDATE COMMUNITY ON CS360 ACTIVITIES.** When implementing CS360 or following through on requests from the community, departments should not consider their work completed until they provide an update to their community. For example, if light towers were installed to create safer spaces for outdoor activity, the agency should use social media to tell the community about the initiative, explain why it was implemented, and thank the partners who made it possible.

## **CASE EXAMPLE**

Social media can work in any size department, though strategies may differ. Police departments cover large areas, so people want to learn about what's happening in their neighborhood and may not necessarily be interested in city-wide official announcements from the police. Many departments open precinct or district-level accounts to provide localized, relevant information. The managers of those accounts should be overseen by headquarters and provided adequate training while still being flexible enough to maintain an authentic, on-the-ground voice. In a large metropolitan police department in the Northeast, the CS360 team identified the need for the department to unify its social media efforts. There was a lack of consistency in the messaging from the district and city-wide, and it was unclear who was authorized to have an official department account. The CS360 team provided recommendations and developed training for the department to help them reinvigorate their social media process.

Additionally, for smaller police departments running social media accounts while handling other priorities can be challenging. In this case, it can be helpful to focus on one channel (Twitter,

Facebook, or Instagram) where the designated PIO or DCO can most effectively convey messages to the community. In a small police department in the Southeast, the CS360 team conducted a scanning process with the department and the community. It was determined that the community wanted more regular social media updates about the police department's efforts. The CS360 team made several recommendations around how the PIO could streamline processes, such as partnering with local leaders to share and repost communications and highlighting even small success stories of the department when there is not a lot of other criminal activity.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS »

- » *COMMUNICATING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT AN EASY TASK. HOWEVER, AVOIDING IT ALTOGETHER IS NO LONGER AN OPTION. AS THE PUBLIC'S EXPECTATIONS FOR OUTREACH AND UPDATES GROW, THE NEED FOR THE DEPARTMENT TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER.*
- » *EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY IS ESSENTIAL IN ANY SIZE AGENCY. FOR LARGER JURISDICTIONS, EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE TO IDENTIFY DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES THAT SHOULD RECEIVE TAILORED OUTREACH AND MESSAGING.*
- » *AGENCIES CAN CREATE A SCALABLE STRATEGY BY TAKING SMALL STEPS SUCH AS SELECTING SOMEONE TO MANAGE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS, CREATING SIMPLE POSTS, AND IDENTIFYING KEY MESSAGES.*
- » *DEPARTMENTS SHOULD NOT CONSIDER THEIR WORK COMPLETED UNTIL THEY UPDATE THEIR COMMUNITY ABOUT THEIR ACTIVITIES.*