I. INTRODUCTION

1. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) established a social media presence in 2009. EIA launched a Twitter account first and then built a Facebook page a few years later in 2012. While the Twitter account thrived, the Facebook account struggled to grow and establish an audience. By the end of 2013, EIA had not yet tapped into additional social media audiences that could be reached by adding new social media platforms.

2. In early 2014, after a few years of Twitter success, EIA determined that it needed to jumpstart its social media program by developing a comprehensive social media strategy. The EIA social media strategy established a way forward and proposed best practices to maximize the effectiveness of EIA’s social media platforms.

II. CREATING A STRATEGY, FOLLOWING A PLAN, FOCUSING ON CONTENT

A. The importance of developing a strategy

3. The EIA social media strategy, drafted in early 2014, established a way forward and proposed best practices to maximize the effectiveness of EIA’s social media platforms. EIA was committed to expanding its social media impact in 2014, and the step-by-step approach resulted in unprecedented growth that set the stage for a successful 2015. EIA essentially doubled its social media influence in one year by committing to a strategy, and by keeping a finger on the pulse of an always-evolving social media environment.

4. As social media evolves, government agencies must be diligent in developing, reviewing, and updating social media strategies. Additionally, to stay relevant in a communications environment that frequently consumes social media, it’s important that government agencies work to expand their use of social media. By evaluating the effectiveness of current tools and by experimenting with new social media platforms and ideas, government agencies can continue to create and maintain effective and dynamic social media programs.

5. Each social media platform has a different audience. Not all content is best suited for all social media platforms. Developing a sound and detailed social media strategy helps determine what content works best on each platform. A social media strategy takes content into consideration first and then fits that content with the best method of delivery. In social
media, content is king, but without an effective strategy, the social media tools, and an audience in place, the content will not reach the people it was designed to reach.

B. Creating a plan and sticking to it

6. EIA researched and analyzed several aspects of its social media program before drafting the social media strategy:
   - The agency looked at metrics provided by the social media platforms and metrics provided by third party applications to get a detailed picture of audience, content performance, and potential areas of growth.
   - EIA examined its audiences on both Twitter and Facebook to determine who followed each platform and to determine what content was performing well.
   - The agency evaluated social media posting times, and worked to determine when EIA’s social media audiences were most active on social media.
   - EIA evaluated what content was failing to make an impact on social media, and worked to determine ways that the underperforming content could be better packaged.
   - The agency dedicated one person to social media management, rather than approaching social media content development and social media content sharing on an ad hoc basis. EIA’s social media manager is a public affairs specialist with several years of social media experience. The social media manager spends more than half of each day managing EIA’s social media platforms, engaging with stakeholders on social media, and developing EIA social media content.
   - After evaluating its social media program, EIA also proposed social media goals.

7. Once EIA had a clear understanding of its social media potential, the agency was able to draft a comprehensive social media strategy that proposed improved management techniques, more effective content creation methods, improved sharing strategies, and social media growth plans. This social media strategy also included potential social media campaigns that had been missing from EIA’s social media content.

8. Using the EIA social media strategy as a foundation, EIA took a systematic approach to increase the size of its Facebook audience, build new social media platforms that would access new audiences not reached on Facebook and Twitter, and refine its efforts on Twitter.

C. Twitter: Tweeting what works, trying new methods

9. Twitter is EIA’s most influential social media presence. EIA actively and effectively shares EIA reports and information about energy trends to its more than 54,000 followers and routinely acquires more than 1,500 new followers each month. The EIA Twitter account maintains an audience composed primarily of energy thought leaders, energy professionals, and the media, so the information shared on the Twitter account consists largely of energy updates, data from EIA reports, and information about energy trends.

10. EIA enjoys a strong presence on Twitter in comparison to other government accounts. It has the second-largest group of followers among all principal statistical agencies in the U.S. federal government. Among principal statistical agencies, only the substantially larger U.S. Census Bureau has more followers than EIA.
In 2014, EIA made a few Twitter content and management changes to improve the overall appearance and presentation of the EIA Twitter account:

- Better graphics
- Weekend posting
- More substantive Tweets
- No repetitive Tweets
- More engagement with other Twitter users
- More Tweets that tell an energy story

The changes made to the management of the EIA Twitter account improved the overall effectiveness of the Twitter account in 2014, and EIA has continued to improve its efforts on Twitter in 2015.

- Improve engagement and track mentions
- Tweet more frequently
- Experiment with Tweeting at different times of the day
- Create and promote more Twitter campaigns
- Live Tweet more events
- Host Twitter chats
- Capitalize on relationships with other agencies using Twitter
- Expand the number of Twitter accounts EIA follows
- Sign up for Twitter directories

D. Facebook: Fighting the trend of falling organic reach

Like all organizations currently using Facebook, EIA had to determine how to respond to the platform’s declining organic reach. As a result, EIA has refined its Facebook strategy by highlighting content that resonates with its Facebook audience, by promoting specific campaigns, and by targeting specific stakeholders through emails and tagging. In 2014, EIA’s organic reach increased substantially, and it continued to collect new likes without using paid advertising. In just a year, EIA has completely reversed the trend of declining organic reach, and now EIA Facebook posts regularly reach more than 2,000 to 3,000 of its followers.

EIA refused to accept that the falling organic reach trend was irreversible. Instead of accepting falling organic reach and limiting its efforts on Facebook, EIA doubled down and increased its focus on Facebook content and outreach. EIA put in place several measures that helped reverse the trend of falling organic reach:

- Shared more dynamic graphs and graphics—Every EIA Facebook post includes a graph or image. Occasionally, the graph is the dominant piece of content.
• Provided content more consistently—In 2013, EIA Facebook posts were sporadic. Now, EIA post each day including weekends.
• Worked with other social media teams to facilitate more content sharing—EIA initiated relationships with dozens of other social media teams to help with information sharing.
• Focused on developing content that followers wanted—By watching how various pieces of content performed on EIA’s Facebook page, EIA was able to determine what content EIA Facebook followers were looking for.
• Created more dynamic Facebook campaigns—EIA began creating weekly, and monthly campaigns so that users could expect something familiar when they visited the Facebook page, or when they encountered EIA content on their news feed.
• Provided more educational content—EIA noticed that Facebook posts with educational energy content were performing surprisingly well. Now, EIA includes on EIA educational Facebook post each Sunday.
• Launched EIA Facebook campaigns that included weekly energy content for U.S. states, and energy content that users could use in their daily life.

E. Flickr: Blazing new social media trails

15. By using Facebook and Twitter, EIA effectively delivered information to a vast and growing online audience. EIA’s presence on Facebook and Twitter was active and largely effective, but EIA determined it was possible to expand its online audience even further through innovation and experimentation with other social media platforms. EIA recognized that it had a substantial amount of energy graphs, maps, and charts, but these visualization products were hard to find. EIA determined that its online audience might be interested in a platform that kept all of EIA’s visual products in one place.

16. EIA’s Flickr page was launched in May 2014. The Flickr page provides users with an avenue to view graphs, charts, maps, and other images produced using EIA’s data and analysis. The images stored on EIA’s Flickr page are categorized by state. This organization method allows the public and EIA’s state, tribal, county, and local stakeholders to quickly find information relating directly to their state’s energy production, consumption, prices, and other energy topics covered by EIA’s reports. The Flickr page has been expanded to include albums for the various energy sources.

17. As of March 2015, there are more than 380 images on the Flickr page, including many graphs and maps from Today in Energy articles. The Flickr page includes graphs and maps that illustrate dozens of important energy trends, including:
• Rising crude oil and natural gas production
• Growth in electricity generation by wind, solar, and other renewables
• Transportation bottlenecks for moving energy supplies and
commodities
• Changes in energy prices

18. EIA struck gold with Flickr. Although it was widely accepted that Flickr would provide the EIA audience with a useful resource, the success of the Flickr account was unexpected. The EIA Flickr account serves as a perfect example of the importance of stepping outside your social media comfort zone. EIA had not used Flickr before, but equipped with a comprehensive strategy, EIA installed a Flickr page, and the audience responded with hundreds of thousands of image views.

F. LinkedIn: Bringing people behind the curtain

19. EIA’s LinkedIn page is designed to communicate EIA’s mission, highlight EIA employee culture, advertise EIA products, highlight EIA employees, and announce open positions. EIA’s LinkedIn presence added a new layer of online communications by focusing less on energy data and more on the people who collect and analyze the energy data. The LinkedIn page demonstrates EIA’s desire to vary the content it features on its social media platforms. Content that works on LinkedIn might not necessarily work as well on Twitter.

III. THE RESULTS OF EIA’S SOCIAL MEDIA PROGRAM

20. EIA’s focus, patience, and dedication to innovation resulted in a social media renaissance. EIA’s Facebook account that had struggled to gain footing in an environment of falling organic reach, grew by 151% in 2014. Facebook growth goals set for fiscal year 2015 were surpassed in the first month of 2015. EIA’s commitment to Twitter best practices resulted in 70% growth in 2014, and EIA is well on its way to passing its 2015 Twitter goals by August 2015.

21. In January 2014, EIA had fewer than 4,300 Facebook likes, and EIA Facebook posts seldom resulted in more than 900 impressions. By March 2015, EIA’s Facebook Page had more than 13,000 likes, and posts frequently topped 4,000 impressions. On March 8, 2015, EIA released a Facebook post that topped 16,900 impressions, surpassing the previous impressions record of 11,200.

22. EIA added 5,844 new Twitter followers in the final three months of 2014, an average of 1,948 followers a month. This is an increase over the third quarter of 2014 when EIA averaged 1,530 new followers each month. EIA now occasionally tops 2,000 new Twitter followers a month and should hit 60,000 followers by August 2015.

23. EIA launched its Flickr account on May 29, 2014. Within one week, the account was already reporting impressive numbers. From May 29, 2014 to June 5, 2014, the 185 photos on the page were viewed a total of 51,119 times. EIA passed half a million total Flickr image views earlier this year and currently has more than 550,000 Flickr image views. At the current pace, EIA expects to hit 1 million image views by early 2016.
IV. EIA’S SOCIAL MEDIA LESSONS LEARNED

24. Over the past year and a half, EIA has learned a great deal about its social media audience and the content they’re interested in. EIA also learned how to improve the way the agency identifies social media content, and how to share that content effectively. Here are a few of EIA’s social media lessons learned:

- EIA’s social media audience responds positively to educational content. Although EIA often uses energy statistics to explain complex energy trends, not all of EIA social media content should be equally complex. Some of the best performing EIA Facebook posts and Tweets have provided the EIA audience with basic state or country energy rankings, or simple explanations of energy systems.

- Strong visuals are essential. Strong supporting graphics are important for all social media content, but this is especially true of EIA social media content. Many people are visual learners, so EIA’s explanation of complex energy trends must be supported with a strong visual element. Additionally, social media posts with supporting visual elements always perform better. All of EIA’s Facebook and LinkedIn posts have a supporting visual element, and EIA is working to increase the number of Tweets with a visual element to 50%.

- Maintaining a balance when featuring content about energy sources can be challenging. EIA is a policy neutral agency, so the agency does not advocate for one specific energy source. However, EIA’s social media audience responds more to content about oil/petroleum and renewables than it does for content about coal and nuclear energy. Although EIA wants to continue to produce posts that perform well, it occasionally has to accept the fact that a post might not perform as well other posts, but it’s important to maintain balance.

- Social media programs can’t go dark on the weekends. Although there are only five work days each week, EIA recognizes the importance of providing content each day of the week. Before implementing the EIA social media strategy, EIA seldom Tweeted or posted on the weekend. Now, EIA posts content each day, including holidays.

- Setting social media goals is essential, but it’s an imperfect process. EIA sets social media goals for itself so that the agency has something to aim for. Unfortunately, it’s difficult to project growth, and occasionally, that results in goals that are met too quickly, or goals that are difficult to achieve. While social media goals are important, they’re not everything. It’s not just about the growth numbers. Growth plateaus are bound to happen, but if the content the agency is producing is still performing well, and the content is still high quality, then it’s important to not obsess about how quickly the audience of a platform is growing. Worrying too much about the growth numbers can become counterproductive.

- Social media adaptation is vital to social media success. Not every social media campaign is going to work. Not all content will be successful. Experimenting and adapting are critical when developing a successful social media program.

- Having an effective social media manager is important. Social media should never be an afterthought, and having a full time social media manager helps organizations plan effectively and quickly respond to social media trends and developments.

- Meeting with social media managers in other agencies helps expand social media exposure. EIA frequently meets with the social media managers of other government
agencies and energy organizations. These social media partnerships help facilitate social media content sharing.

V. CONCLUSION

25. EIA expanded its social media impact in 2014. EIA doubled its social media influence in one year by committing to a strategy, and by placing content development at the top of its list of social media priorities.

26. Social media success is heavily dependent on the effort committed to planning. EIA has placed greater emphasis on drafting content, planning campaigns, and developing fresh approaches to social media content sharing. EIA’s focus on clean, concise, and dynamic content has resulted in increased success on EIA’s social media platforms. EIA’s recent social media growth shows that the public has responded positively to EIA’s social media content and the agency’s commitment to social media planning.

VI. EIA SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS

27. EIA on Twitter: http://twitter.com/EIAgov
28. EIA on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/eiagov
29. EIA on LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/company/u-s-energy-information-administration
30. EIA on Flickr: http://www.flickr.com/photos/eiagov/
31. EIA on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/EIAgov