

# 45 IDEAS – BEST TOOLS FOR CREATIVE AND EASY SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

## MODERATOR

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## BIOGRAPHY OF PANELISTS

**L.A. Sokolowski** is recipient of the 2017 AHP Chris Brune Spirit Award, 2016 Syracuse Press Club sports writing award, and a 4x winner and 8x finalist in the AHP Media Awards. Branding herself since 2009 as the original equinista (fashionista + equestrienne), she has more than 10,000 followers across multiple social media platforms while covering the art, film fashion, literature and lifestyles that celebrate our horse world.

**Mollie Bailey** has been on the editorial staff with The Chronicle of the Horse magazine since 2000, and she currently serves as a senior reporter focusing on hunters, jumpers and major issues in national and international horse sport. Before joining the staff at The Chronicle, she worked on the national show circuit as a groom and rider for a top hunter/jumper barn. These days you can find her legging up fox hunters when she's not in the Middleburg, Virginia, office or on assignment at the major competition.

**Lindsay Paulsen** is the Managing Editor and Web and Social Media manager at Dressage Today, a monthly international dressage training publication. Based in Rockville, Maryland, she is a USDF bronze medalist and the proud mother of two sassy mares.

**Ashyn Flanagan** is the VP of Communications for Straight Arrow Inc, the makers of Mane 'n Tail, Cowboy Magic and Exhibitor's. Ashyn has a diverse background in sales/marketing, creative consulting, teaching, managing and inspiring others throughout her career. She has been behind the scenes at Straight Arrow for the past five years and made it official in 2017.

**Rhonda Lane** has managed social media for the New England Crime Bake, a regional crime fiction writer's conference, for the past six years. She's a member of Sisters in Crime, Mystery Writers of America, Romance Writers of America, and, of course, AHP. Her short story "On Like Donkey Kong" appears in FISH OUT OF WATER, A GUPPY ANTHOLOGY. She is a text contributor to TRACK LIFE: IMAGES & WORDS by fine art photographer Juliet Harrison. Lane created and operates The Horsey Set Net blog, now in its tenth year, and is working on a mystery set in a southern equestrian community.

1. Every stroke counts: Cut the commas.
2. Keep a stock file of in-house eye-popping and hilarious images useful for the current and future social media posts. Photos and videos are key to engaging readers.
3. Embrace controversy and encourage discussion. Don't be afraid to post an article that might be slightly controversial as engagement is great for traffic! Be sure to monitor carefully, however, and make deliberate decisions about what "controversial" content you post. Constructive discussion is good, but fighting is not.
4. Make sure you have the right tools to start with. If you really want to embark into social media in a professional manner you need to start with the highest grade tools you can access. Yes, you can use your cell phone to take pictures, but this will limit you greatly as you progress. A cell phone even the newest model is never going to give you the quality of a Canon EOS 5D Mark IV or other DSLR camera. Don't be afraid to invest in the right tools. Learn everything you can about your camera, be it phone or high investment, understanding the option you have at your fingertips is key to making adjustments AS you shoot rather than trying to fix pictures in your computer later.
5. "What do I Post?" Think about why you visit social media. To pass time while waiting. Keep in touch with friends and family. To seek information. That's how our audience uses it, too. Entertain and/or inform. And have you ever had someone you admire professionally respond to what you wrote? It's exciting. And it goes both ways. You are someone your followers admire. Respond to their posts.
6. Share/Tag high-click connections: Use @ and # symbols with anything/everything you capitalize, i.e. @LonginesMasters, #BeautyforReal.
7. With the changing social media landscape, get input from interns and/or newer staffers when choosing what apps or techniques are worth the time. Different generations use social differently, and internal collaboration and experimentation are important to find a strategy that will work well.

8. Know your most popular content. Know your top performing articles/content and share them strategically. Keep tabs on what content you can share and dependably receive a good response to it. This is especially good for boosting traffic when it's down.
9. Creativity can unleash the moment you leave your desktop and discover the world from the perspective of your handheld device. Take pictures of something that has nothing to do with your product or your next campaign you have all lined up. There is something amazing when you just start capturing moments around you. A pattern on a rug at the hotel you just stepped into, a backyard scene, a favorite color on a billboard. These things can come together and tell your next story; it's inspirational, like creating a color board. Social media gets us to step out of our comfort zones and see things differently, start where you are and start clicking!
10. How I Started on Twitter. My early Twitter strategy was three-tiered. I posted something about writing, something about horses, and something about my life each day. I'd also respond to and join in a conversation. I'd be a person. When I retweet, I add my own comment. That way the originator of the post has an opportunity to not only like it but also keep the conversation going.
11. Tag your Shares: It's not just professional respect it opens the door to inviting their Follows, too, which can grow your base.
12. Find the right balance of editorial posts and advertising posts. Be sure paid posts are marked very clearly.
13. Repurpose what you already have available. Our readers respond well to training tips, poignant quotes and attention-grabbing graphics. I had our graphic designer take some quotes from articles and she was able to turn them into visually interesting and engaging graphics.
14. Sometimes we can get into slumps and we need something to get us started. Get creative through word imagery! Create a character, use one from a book or think of a person you look up to or even a historical figure. What does the world look like through their eyes? What would they like to see? What do they wear? How do they act? Where would their vision take you? Music lyrics are also great for creative flow, simply pick a song and let the lyrics paint

the picture. "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" from Elton John or "The Lazy Song" by Bruno Mars. Are those images coming in yet?

15. Canva. For those of us who can't make Photoshop do tricks, Canva.com works for making memes and graphics. Free Canva has a free image library, but keep in mind there are no images of horses. Canva has a learning curve, not as steep as Photoshop, but there are lots of free tutorials and templates to get you going. Apply "just in time learning" as you work.
16. Don't ignore the cog icon – get to know your Settings! Link accounts like IG (Instagram) and FB (Facebook) together to streamline your effort.
17. Ask a question in social media posts to increase user engagement, or give an instruction to "click" or "like" or "vote."
18. Honor the unique personality of each of your social media audiences. Study the slight differences in your Facebook audience versus Instagram audience, etc. Instagram typically includes a younger audience that might be more appreciative of creativity and less so of technical advice, while Facebook might be more article-and text-heavy.
19. Be organized with all of your stock photos, original photographs, edits, redo's and posts. Things can get disorganized VERY quickly. We implemented Dropbox as an internal Cloud drive that really works. Where Adobe cloud and Apple cloud ends, the Dropbox cloud begins. It is very intuitive, and we have used this to collaborate on projects and keeping all of our content highly organized. One of the best features is the ability to comment, this helps us keep notes on the file, as well as copy we used when we posted on social media, where we posted and when. It also allows the content to be at our fingertips for posting to social media from our phones or tablets, anytime anywhere.
20. Picfont. The simplest tool for making a meme or a graphic of text over an image. Picfont.com is a free website. Upload your photo, a landscape or horizontal. You add the text in various fonts like you do if you've made business cards with Vistaprint. Download to your computer and upload it to the social media platform.

21. Keep the social in Social – Like and Reply to responses to your posts. Visit their page and respond in kind.
22. Have one person assigned to oversee reader engagement, i.e. answering questions on Facebook; re-tweeting or responding appropriately on Twitter, checking appropriate hastags on Instagram.
23. Play with formatting on Facebook. Is it better to share something as an article with a preview or as a standalone photo with a link attached? For example, our Solutions column is very illustration based. It does significantly better when shared as a photo with a link at the bottom than it does as an article with a preview.
24. The app Over is one of our go-to's. This app allows you to upload all of those great photos and create stunning images in minutes right from your cellphone or tablet. They have tons of customizable templates to get your creative flowing. Fonts are built in and graphics packs are part of the fun. It's a simple feat to add your company logo to a picture you just took. The layers and picture editing is zeroed down to any easy platform. Circles are groups you can make an Over where you can edit and work on pictures together in groups. We have made Over Circles where it's Raw – which lets others in the circle that someone is still working on it. We have circles for different brands, holidays etc. It really makes it very quick to jump on handhelds and get going. Price: Free version, 9.99/mo, 59.99/year. Works for Twitter, Facebook, Instagram (including stories and highlights), Pinterest, Google+.
25. Snapseed. A photo editor for your phone is Snapseed, an app available for Android and Apple phone. It's intuitive. You can use effects filters, crop. I don't have a lot to say about it because I'm still getting my fingers around this one. Hey we're always learning, right. Anyway, if you're doing Instagram, you definitely need to use Snapseed.
26. Make Live Feed your new best friend. The future of social media is short videos that feel real and boots-on-the-ground.
27. Proofread your posts. Twice.
28. Recycle evergreen content. Some of our best performing articles are training articles from 20 years ago. The photos aren't always flashy or super grabby,

but our readership cares about the quality of training information and we can count on those posts to do well.

29. The app Preview is one of our picks for Instagram planning. Preview is able to help you grab up content for re-sharing on Instagram quickly and easily. You can then arrange them and help your Instagram theme. Preview can also arrange your own photos and content you have created in a format where you can visually see what it will look like on your Instagram feed. It helps to allow for organizing your content plan in advance. You can add unlimited accounts and have several feeds going for all your different Instagram accounts if you have multiple accounts. It also comes with a serious amount of filters to keep your look fresh. You can track your performance finding the best times to post and the best hashtags. Remember Hashtags are your best hidden draw for your posts, if you are not hash-tagging on Instagram you are missing out on a powerful tool. In fact, Instagram now gives you statistics on how many people your posts are reaching by hashtags. Cost: Free/Pro is \$7.99. Works for Instagram.
30. Facebook. All about Faces. Got a great scenic image with no people in it? Too bad. Facebook's algorithm seeks human faces. Animal faces are the next best. Lucky us, right? If you have a scenic image or a still life, figure out a way to put the human – or, in our cases – the equine element in there. Hence, the internet is full of forty bajillion selfies. Not that there's anything wrong with that.
31. Save slick production for podcasts: Keep Live Feeds intimate and genuine (a priority for today's users). "Werk" your hand-held.
32. Understand the nuances between the different platforms (or hire someone who does). Don't just copy and paste the same post on multiple platforms.
33. Provide what your readers like, even if you don't always love it (memes, ugh). Sometimes you just can't argue with something that your readers respond well to, even if you don't think it's a seamless fit for your brand.
34. Adobe Lightroom, in all its forms. If you have been afraid of treading into the Photoshop water, lightroom is a great first step and in fact can be the only one you need. Lightroom has almost unlimited amount of tools for editing the look of a picture, add professional filters and take a photo you thought was a trashcan snap into a beautiful capture for your next ad. One of the

most powerful things I find with Lightroom is that its mobile platform is just as intuitive as the desktop version. There are hidden benefits from grabbing a tablet first when going through your photos of the day or week, easily picking your favorites and flagging your discards.

35. Time Zones. Be mindful of your audience and what's going on in their time zone when you post. For the conference Facebook page I manage, I time posts to publish at 5:05 EDT or EST. Most of our attendees come from the US East Coast. At 5 pm, they're just shifting their days from work to downtime. When you write the post, next to the Post button, is a down arrow. Click on the arrow to Schedule a post.
36. VIMEO is changing its platform. Less 2<sup>nd</sup> fiddle to YouTube as a place to watch videos, more evolution into facilitating indie video production. Keep this social media on your radar.
37. Give credit to photographers and other content creators in your post. Link to them or tag, them, or at the very least officially credit them, whether they're a major news outlet or a grassroots rider.
38. Capitalize on trends and themes. Pick a topic theme that all of your content can relate to for that week. It might be centered around a holiday, upcoming event, trainer, a breed of horse, a health care topic or a training topic.
39. Enlight Photofox is an app that puts the power of Photoshop into an app that you can use anywhere. This is especially helpful when changing backgrounds and creating surreal affects. You can adjust and erase layers in this app as well as layers, blending modes, special effects, brushes, and fonts. They offer professional tutorials that allow you to learn special effects with a great plus. This is a great app without the hefty price tag of the desktop versions.
40. Hootsuite. I prefer free HootSuite for scheduling tweets, for not only its schedule function, but also its built in URL shortener Owly. I use columns for search areas: horses, specific breeds of horses and equestrian activities, my writer pals, literary agents I'm monitoring. I only use Hootsuite on a computer, though, not on my phone.
41. Sign up for Google alerts: Don't waste time chasing news of interest to you and your branding let it come to you.

42. Use the same name for all your social media accounts if at all possible.
43. Vet the things you share. This might be common sense, but it's worth mentioning. It is SO easy to click the share button, but before you do, take a few minutes to look into the source and the date that the content was originally shared. Also translate any foreign languages!
44. SplitPic is an app that allows you to divide your camera into several sections with layouts to blend images together or create sharp contrast. What we love most about the app is the ability to change from choice to choice with a simple click. You can also filter each section separately. You can collaborate with friends or influencers by taking part of a photo, then they add the rest. This makes for a very fun giveaway create idea!
45. Twitter Organization. However, on my phone, I use the Twitter app. If I need to monitor a subject, I set up a Twitter list and load it with Twitter accounts of those who are liable to be talking about my subject of interest. The list function works off the Follow button on your homepage.

## ADDITIONAL TOOLS

- Utilize free imagery in whatever way you can. We know that content needs to have a strong graphic component in order to perform well. We don't have an unlimited budget for photos, so we have to get creative with what we have available to us. To work around this, I've had our graphics designer create some generic illustrations that can be used to break up text on the page and accompany an article preview (such as an illustration of a dressage horse's head, a helmet, a boot and a saddle.)
- IG is the fastest-growing social media: Learn its Story function, download a Regramm app to share more (IG is beta-testing its own Share and soon we'll be resharing without an extra app).
- One Post To Rule Them All? Some social media apps have a way to link and share on another platform simultaneously. That's a timesaver, sure, but I'm iffy about the effectiveness. Photography stands on Instagram are higher than they are on Facebook and Twitter, plus the post may only show a URL, to the original post, not the image. You want the image visible and attracting attention. If you want posts across all platforms you use, just take the time to make separate posts.
- Know your readership's "idols." I can name about five people that our readership will positively respond to almost no matter what and when they share something on social media. I know it will be a win with our audience if I share it, too.
- PhotoGrid – Video & Pic Editing is perfect for when you want to make fun picture collages. They always offer items that match the different seasons and it's easy to make a great grid that looks great! There is also another app for Instagram with a similar name but this app allows you to make a photo into a three part or six part Instagram post.
- If you do popularize a hashtag regularly, check that hashtag (and similar ones) and interact with fans that way.
- Images. No matter which platform you use, images attract the most views, even if what you're promoting is only words. I'm an author. Words are my game. But images attract attention. So, if I don't have a picture, I search for a

.gif, via a search function built into Facebook and Twitter, IMO, video helps, too. Facebook's algorithm is said to welcome original video. Instagram is all about the pictures and short videos.

- Hashtags: Hashtags help your posts get seen, especially on Twitter and Instagram. Make the effort to find the appropriate hashtags that put your posts in front of a specific audience. Jamie Samples of Yellow Barn Media offers a free list of 95 horse-related hashtags for Instagram.
- Form alliances when possible. Who do you have in your professional network that you can team up with to share ideas and content? Maybe it's a specific product brand or maybe it's another publication that compliments yours, or, another influencer on social media. It's nice to give other professionals/organizations a boost while giving your readership something new.
- Brushstroke – This is the perfect app for taking an original or stock photo and creating it into a painting. I always go for more intense options allowing you to create a water color effect and create a stunning work of art, or the next centerpiece to your ad campaign. This app is VERY quick and easy to learn and has truly high end results. You can even have your art printed as a stretched canvas for your office or home wall.
- Get Or Own The Rights To Images. Getting images to use, if you haven't taken them or you aren't with the entity that owns the image you want to use, is necessary. Look up what you need on CreativeCommons.org. Even then, make sure the license on the image allows you to use it, especially if you have a commercial site that you or someone else makes money from it. Also, if people are recognizable and identifiable, you need to be certain there's a model release.
- Facebook Groups. One way to get around your page having to pay, er, boost visibility is to set up a Facebook Group run by you. Now, groups have more helpful purposes than "let me help you spend your money on my product." Think of something your customer might need for support, a way to serve an underserved niche for content. Make sure the group is active so it shows up in the user's timeline. And make sure you participate. If members see you as helpful, they may be inclined to help you, too.

- The App StoryRepost has been our go to for reposting our fans and influences stories they tag us in. Make sure you always retag your originator and get their permission for best social media practices. Adding these to our Instagram Highlights is another way to keep these reposted stories as well as our own original stories in a place everyone can access for longer than 24 hours.
- Fishing, Not Feeding. Please keep in mind, we don't own anything on a social media platform. Visibility algorithms are subject to constant change. You can't depend on your customers or fans seeing everything you post anyway, even if you blast the same post several times a day. (Don't do that.) The most dependable way to reach an interested audience is via an email list you own. The only advantage to social media is your customers and fans are there already hanging out because those apps have a vested interest in keeping users there. Social media is not a way to amass your content, but a means to an end.
- Tag Smart. Think about sponsors, current and former riders, farms and grooms affiliated with the horse.