

# Communicating your County's Budget to Constituents

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## 2024 Commissioners Court Administrative Training

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**DR. PETER MCGUILL**

**DIRECTOR, V.G. YOUNG INSTITUTE  
OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT**



# Objectives of Session

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- ▶ Develop your Message
- ▶ Communicate your Message
- ▶ Tools and Platforms
- ▶ Getting the Desired Results



*Ralph Yarborough campaigning on courthouse steps, Denison, Texas. 1954.*

*Photos by Russell Lee/Courtesy the Center for American History, UT-Austin*







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**facebook**

**LIVE**



**YouTube**

# Why is it Important to Communicate Public Value of County Expenditures?

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- ▶ It's Part of the Job
- ▶ It's Your Duty
- ▶ Gain Public Support
- ▶ Increase the Satisfaction of Constituents
- ▶ Build Trust Through Transparency
- ▶ Educate Citizens About County Government



# County Expenditures

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# Tell your Story

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# Develop Your Message – Overview

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- ▶ Identify audience(s)
- ▶ Anticipate audience concerns & interests
- ▶ What is the objective of your message?
  - ▶ What you say is not always what others hear.
- ▶ Discuss and share with others – **NO SURPRISES!**

## Identifying your audiences

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- ▶ Who is your audience(s)?
- ▶ Civic organization
- ▶ Neighbor
- ▶ Concerned taxpayer
- ▶ ...



# Anticipate Concerns and Questions

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- ▶ What budget increases/ decreases are anticipated?
- ▶ What are the Mandated vs. Discretionary budget items?
- ▶ Who is opposing your efforts?
- ▶ Who will be most negatively affected by budget actions?

# Crafting the message

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- ▶ Take the time to put the words on paper – if you don't write it down, you don't know what your message is going to be.
- ▶ Don't placate to the audience
- ▶ Be objective

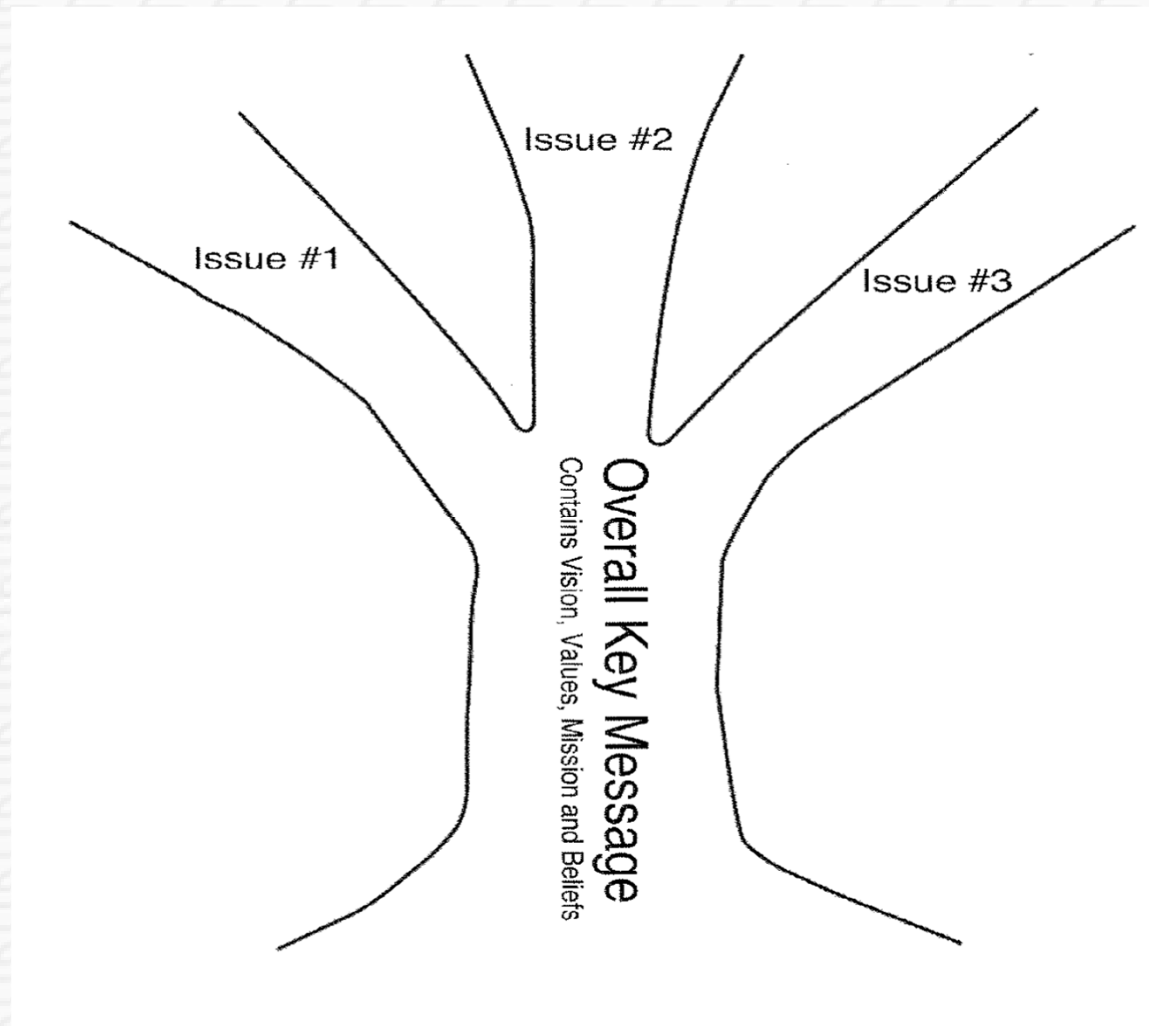






# Key Message Tree

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# Message Tree

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- ▶ Use Simple 1-2-3- explanations
- ▶ Make every additional sentence quotable and able to stand on its own
- ▶ No technical jargon or acronyms
- ▶ Use analogies to explain complicated issues
- ▶ Never give long list of examples- cluster of 3
- ▶ Don't bore anyone with your details – They Don't Care!

At \_\_\_\_\_ County our goal is to \_\_\_\_\_,

We do that by \_\_\_\_\_;

We do that by \_\_\_\_\_;

And we do that by \_\_\_\_\_.

Branch Issue #1:

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Branch Issue #2:

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Branch Issue #3

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At Cowpuncher County our goal is to be a place that folks want to make home,

We do that by Providing for public safety;

We do that by Maintaining safe county roads;

And we do that by Providing services that are important to our families.

### Branch Issue #1:

In the area of public safety, we aim to provide our Sheriff with the resources that he needs to keep our communities safe and keep criminals off of the streets by maintaining our jail and providing for our County and District courts.

### Branch Issue #2:

We strive to provide safe all-weather road surfaces for our growing rural populations by developing a highly skilled road and bridge workforce and providing the tools and equipment they need to ensure that your family and mine can travel safely around the county.

### Branch Issue #3

We are proud of the services, such as the county parks and library in Cowpuncher County. This along with the services offered by our great county departments make this county a great place to live and raise a family.

# Best Practices For Crafting The Message

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## Do

- ▶ Be compassionate, understanding and empathetic (People want to be Heard)
- ▶ Be ready with your message. Practice it to perfection
- ▶ Be positive!

## Do Not

- ▶ Blame Others.
- ▶ Make an issue out of something that no one else is.
- ▶ Build a platform for debate where one does not exist.

# Communicate Your Message - Media

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- ▶ Consider current platforms – radio, t.v., newspaper, website, email, social media
- ▶ Where do you hear from your constituents currently?
- ▶ Age demographics and platform considerations

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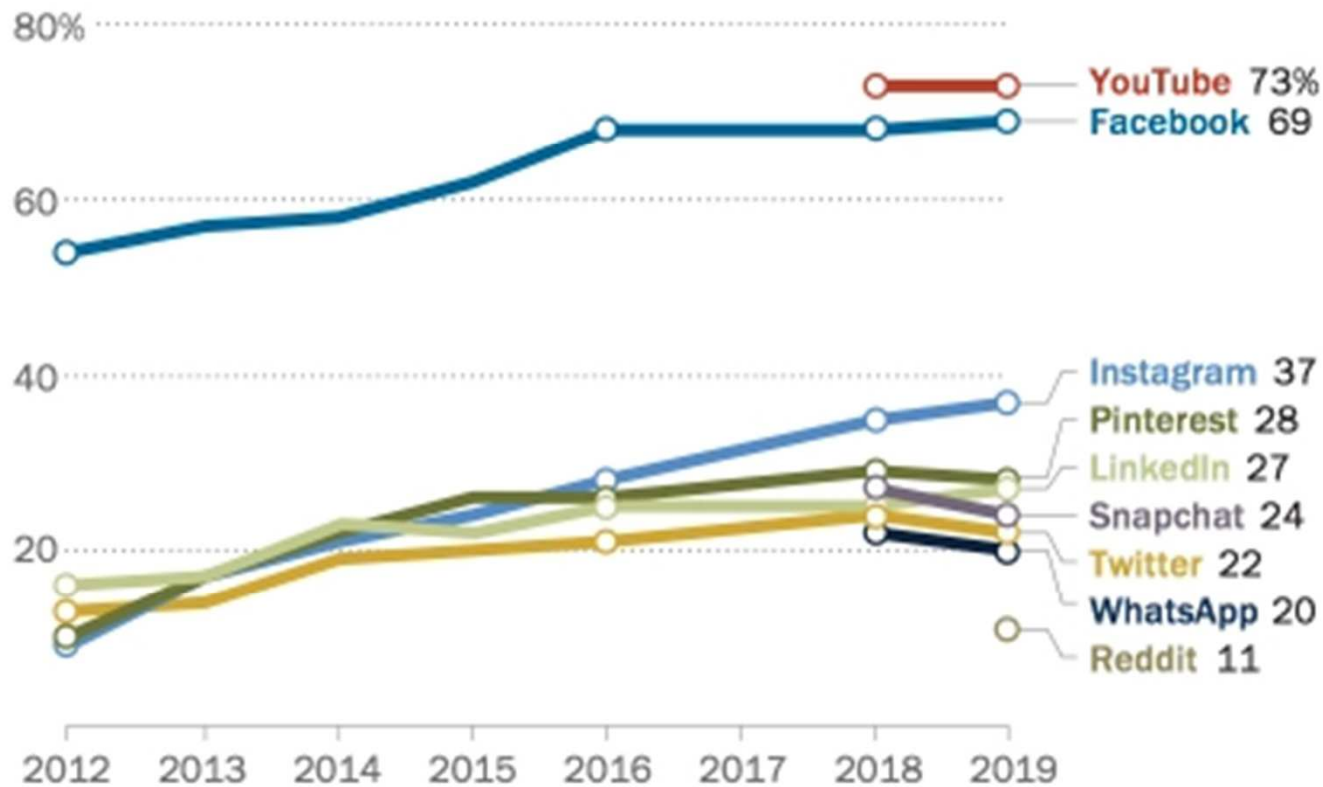
# Social Media

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## Facebook, YouTube continue to be the most widely used online platforms among U.S. adults

*% of U.S. adults who say they ever use the following online platforms or messaging apps online or on their cellphone*



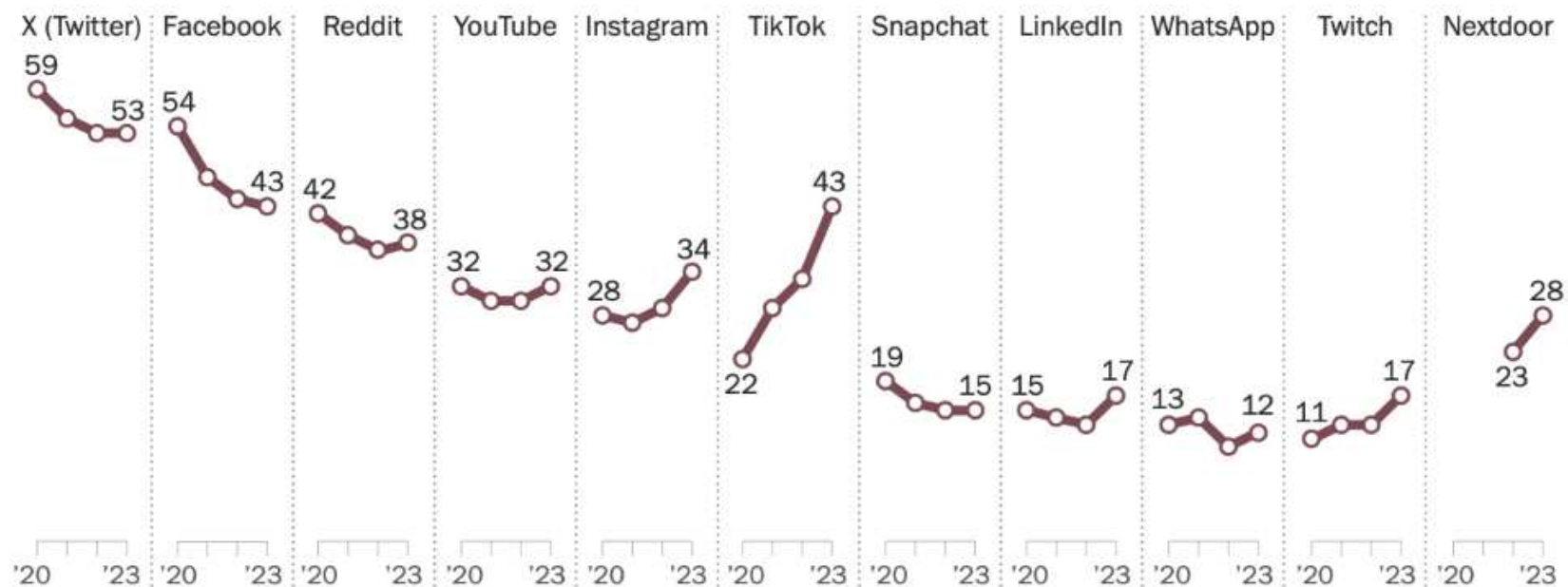
Note: Pre-2018 telephone poll data is not available for YouTube, Snapchat and WhatsApp. Comparable trend data is not available for Reddit.

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

## Share of TikTok users who regularly get news there has nearly doubled since 2020

% of each social media site's users who **regularly** get news there

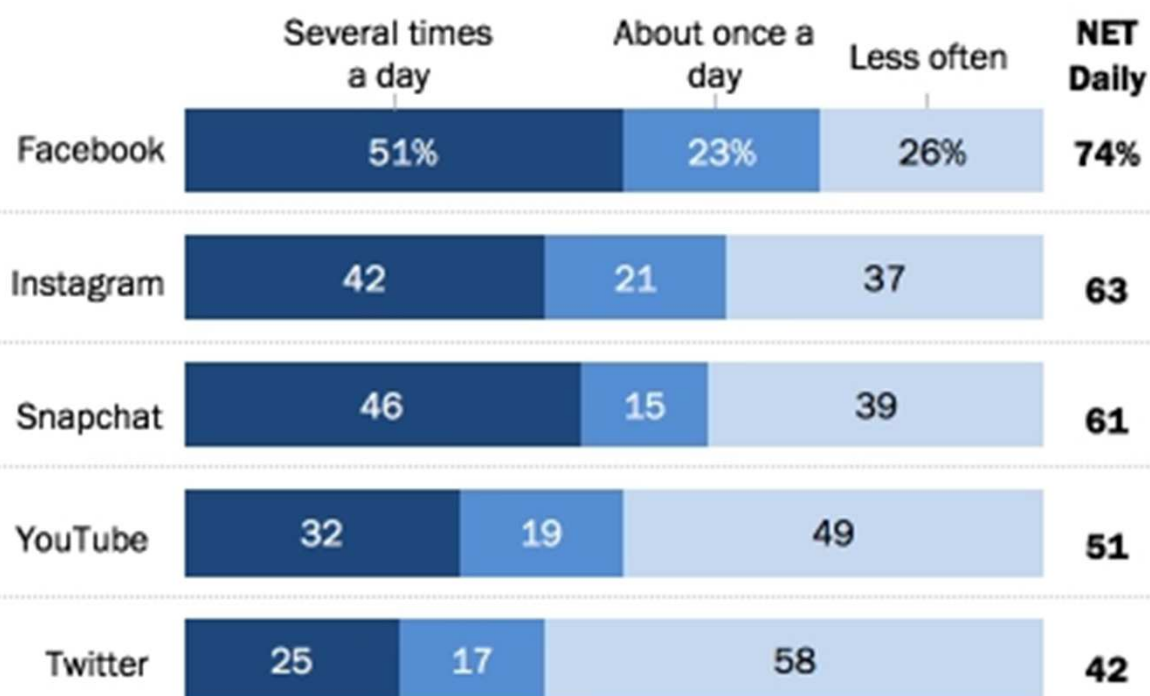


Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25–Oct. 1, 2023.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

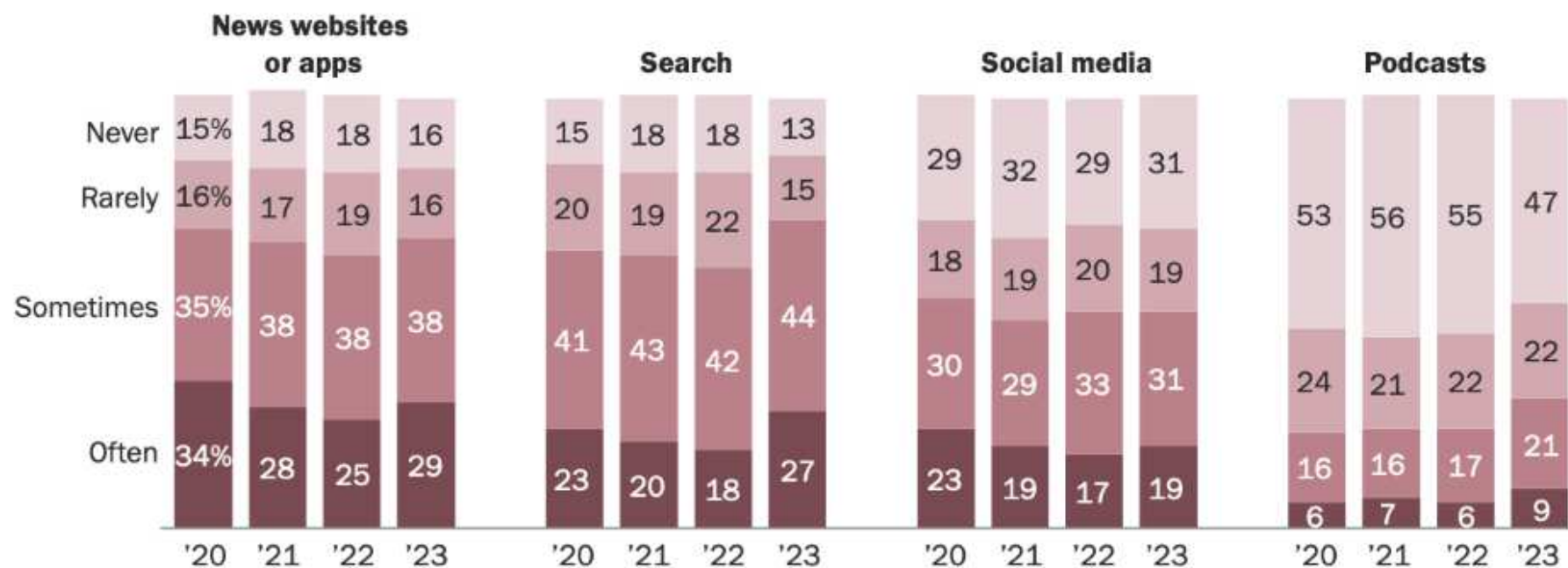
## Roughly three-quarters of Facebook users visit the site on a daily basis

Among U.S. adults who say they use \_\_\_\_, % who use each site ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. "Less often" category includes users who visit these sites a few times a week, every few weeks or less often.  
 Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**



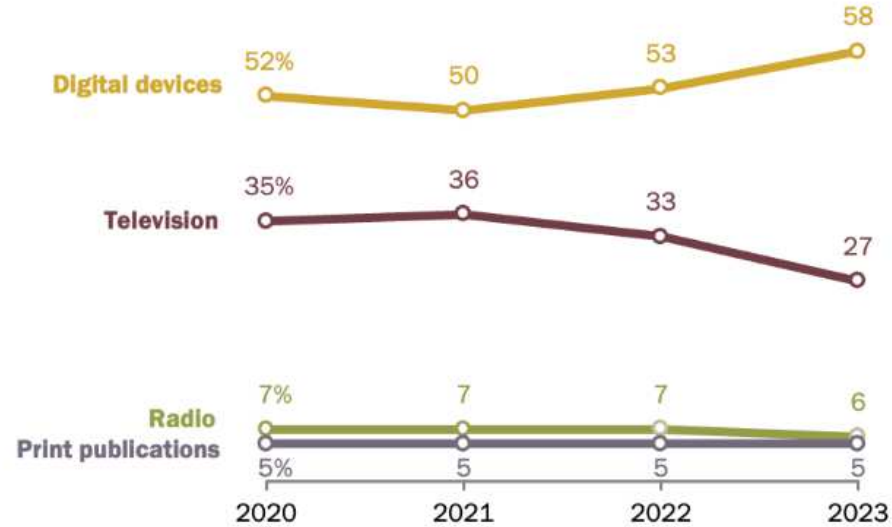
Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Respondents who do not have internet access at home did not receive these questions; they are included with those who said "Never," along with those who say they do not get news from digital devices.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

## News platform preferences

% of U.S. adults who *prefer* \_\_\_\_ for getting news

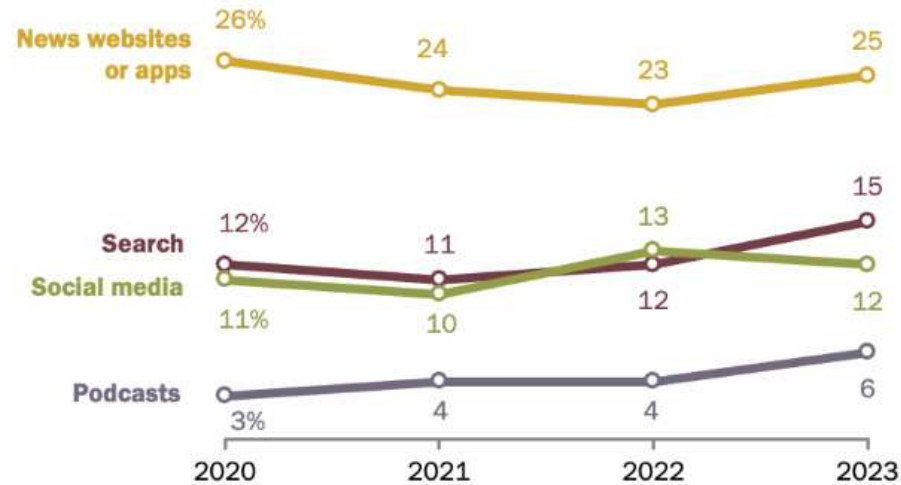


Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Digital news platform preferences

% of U.S. adults who *prefer* \_\_\_\_ for getting news



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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# Ways to use social media

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Jen Crossover, Comal County Commissioner Pct 4  
5d · 🌐

Congratulations to these Comal County 4H Rock Stars for representing us so well! We are proud of y'all!

Leaders in the making, y'all...

Fun Fact--my own community service started many moons ago when I was a young 4Her!  
#HeadHeartHandsHealth



Comal County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and 4-H  
5d · 🌐

Congratulations to our outstanding 4-H members for the District 9 Horse Quiz Invitational...  
First placed Senior Team and 2nd Place Junior team!

👍❤️ 29      2 comments 1 share

# CONNECT

# CELEBRATE GREAT THINGS HAPPENING IN THE COMMUNITY





**J. D. Clark**  
20h · 🌐

**Slick Spots Expected Late Tonight**  
Weather Forecast Office Fort Worth, TX  
Issued January 23, 2024

**Driving On Icy Bridges**  
Weather Forecast Office Fort Worth, TX  
Conduciendo en puentes helados

**Expect**  
Less than 0.06" A few slick bridges/overpasses

Timing	
<b>Beginning</b>	Sunday Evening
<b>Peak</b>	Overnight Sunday
<b>Ending</b>	Early Monday Morning

**What**  
Delay alternate travel  
Slow driving additional

**Impacts**  
**Roads & Transportation**  
Main surface roads should remain ice free. Bridges and overpasses could become icy.

**Why Do Bridges Freeze First?**

- No ground underneath means the entire structure can be surrounded by cold air
- Freezing isn't uniform- shaded parts can be icy while sunny parts aren't
- Slow down before the bridge, as changing speed on ice is dangerous

**¿POR QUÉ LOS PUENTES SE CONGELAN?**  
La falta de suelo debajo de los puentes

**Wise County Office of Emergency Management**  
20h · 🌐

1.21.24 3:38pm  
Low travel impacts will be possible this evening and tonight along the Red River. Slick spots will remain confined to mainly bridges and overpass... [See more](#)

👍 5      1 comment   3 shares

# BROADCAST

# PROVIDE USEFUL INFORMATION TO PEOPLE IN THE COUNTY



Jen Crossover, Comal County Commissioner Pct 4

3h · 🌐

Do not drive through the low water crossings!  
 Our crews are out in full force, cleaning up fallen trees, and marking the low water crossings.  
 Take your time, not your chances.



👍👍 54 9 comments 7 shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



Victoria County, TX

41m · 🌐

Attention: Road Closure Notice in Precinct 4

VICTORIA COUNTY PCT. 4

# Attention: Road Closure



## ROAD CLOSURE NOTICE

- Tipton Rd. at Casa Blanca Bridge
- Benbow Rd. at Garcitas Creek Bridge

👍👍 5

1 comment 11 shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share





Commissioner Mark Gillespie

Yesterday at 7:56 AM · 🌐



PCT1

Okay, I get it you wanna cleanup your place to make you feel better about yourself. But this???? No, this will come back and haunt you in the end. You either got paid to haul it off and dumped it out and took the cash, you just cleaned your place and did this yourself or you hired a cheap lowlife and this is the results.. EITHER WAY ITS NOT COOL You know who you are. Sleep well.

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# ENGAGE CITIZENS

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SHED LIGHT ON ISSUES THAT  
AFFECT THE COMMUNITY.  
ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION



Commissioner Mark Gillespie

June 20, 2023 · 🌐



## ATASCOSA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Atascosa County Sheriff's Office is now accepting applications for the the position of Corrections Officer.

All Applicants must be:

- 20 Years of Age
- Pass a stringent background check
- Pass a drug test, physical, & psychological test
- Available for 12-hour shift work (day or night)

Applicants with previous Corrections experience will be given first priority.

Benefits Include:

- Paid Training – License must be obtained in the first year
- Paid Vacation & Sick Leave
- Retirement Plan with TCDRS
- Medical Insurance Provided (Dental & Vision Available)
- Annual Longevity Bonus after 4 years of employment
- Free \$10,000 life insurance policy provided by the county
- Holiday pay equal to \$150 paid monthly
- Uniform Allowance of \$120 paid monthly

Salary After 90-day probation and acquiring Jailer's License:

**\$48,217.00**

For more information, call 830-769-3434, ext. 2248.



Applications only available at 1108 Campbell Avenue in Jourdanton or SCAN the QR code to download the application.



Atascosa County Sheriff's Office

June 20, 2023 · 🌐

\*\*\*UPDATE\*\*\*

\$3,000 annual raise has been approved for January 1st. Openings are available.

The Atascosa County Sheriff's Office is currently accepting applic... See more



7

4 shares

# SELF- PROMOTE

# NOW THAT YOU HAVE DEVELOPED A FOLLOWING – MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU!

TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION



Comal County, Texas

July 27 · 🌐



Commissioners Court yesterday honored Ralph Martinez for 30 years of service to the residents of Comal County. Ralph works for the Facilities Maintenance Department, making sure the county's downtown buildings are clean and well-maintained for the public and county employees. Thanks for all of your hard work, Ralph!



👍❤️👏 106

11 Comments 4 Shares



Like



Comment



Share



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# PROMOTE OTHERS

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# RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC ATTRACTS TALENT TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

TEXAS A&M  
AGRI  
LIFE  
EXTENSION

# Establish Guidelines

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- ▶ Maintain control of account information
- ▶ Authorize a limited number of people to post to social media accounts
- ▶ Do not respond to negative comments
- ▶ Stick to the issue
- ▶ Don't post negative comments about others
- ▶ Don't share "fake news" – unless you want to be the news

# Public Information Act

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- ▶ The Texas Public Information Act was modernized in 2013 to include internet postings and other
- ▶ Content posted by the agency or the public on an agency's media website is a state record (Government Code, Section 441.180(11)), and is subject to State Records Retention in Government Code Chapter 441, Subchapter L, 441.180-205.electronic communications with Senate Bill 1368.
- ▶ "An agency may be prohibited from deleting social media regardless of its established records retention policy, if the record is the subject of legal claims or actions (Government Code, Section 441.187). In addition, state and federal courts require the preservation of relevant records if a judicial or administrative action is reasonably foreseeable, even if such action is not yet initiated."

# Blocking and deleting negative comments

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- ▶ Clark v. Kolkhorst
  - ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment and Due Process
  - ▶ Public Servant or Private Citizen
- ▶ Recommendation
  - ▶ Separate official social media account
  - ▶ Establish guidelines for posting/  
commenting



# Speaking the Language

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- ▶ Repetition – again and again and again... “Sticky” Messages
- ▶ Develop a communications strategy.
- ▶ What you say is not always what others hear

# Communicate the County budget

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- ▶ % of the budget that is mandated.
  - ▶ Jail, Indigent Defense, etc.
- ▶ % of the budget that is quality of life amenities.
  - ▶ Parks, Library, Senior Center, Youth Programs, Etc.

# Example: “Sticky Message” about County Expenditures

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# Getting Results

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# Getting Results

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- ▶ Speak to what is important to the person or group with targeted messaging.
- ▶ Identify and utilize respected opinion leaders in your county to help spread your message.
- ▶ Keep the tone and tenor of the message on topic and positive.

## On-Going Effort

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- ▶ Audience discovery never stops
- ▶ Citizens have an expectation of transparency in Government
- ▶ Effort and Persistence pays off in the long run

## In Summary

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- ✓ Identify your audiences
- ✓ Create messages as a court
  - ✓ “Sticky Messages”
- ✓ Decide on the media to use
- ✓ Be ready with your message
- ✓ Be consistent in what you say
- ✓ It is an ongoing effort

# Questions?

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**Peter J. McGuill, Ph.D.**  
**Director**

**V.G. Young Institute of County Government**  
**Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service**

**Phone: 979-845-4572**

**[pjmcguill@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:pjmcguill@ag.tamu.edu)**

**[vgyi.tamu.edu](http://vgyi.tamu.edu)**