

# INTRODUCTION



While government agencies and school districts had already been working on “going digital” long before the global COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdowns and closures made it necessary to accelerate the move. And while 2022 saw restrictions on in-person interactions largely lifted, many embraced the change to online interactions, further cementing social media as a primary communication tool. Now more than ever, social media is one of the first places community members look for information and updates from their government, schools, and other public institutions.

The maturity of social media as a communication channel is reflected in the level of experience of this year’s survey respondents. Roughly 26% reported ten years or more using social media as part of their regular responsibilities, up almost 16% year-over-year (YoY). It’s a good thing, too, as that experience is needed to deal with the myriad of challenges facing today’s communicators, including controversial topics, online criticism, and misinformation. The polarized political climate often turned comment sections into battlegrounds, with

public communicators caught in the middle, trying to figure out how best to referee it all while being mindful of First Amendment restrictions and public records laws.

Despite this, the opportunities of social media and its ability to amplify and scale messaging at lightning speed outweigh the challenges. While many communicators have certainly had moments of wanting to just shut it down, few take this drastic step because the benefits are measurable and real. And as the platforms continue to evolve, so do the opportunities to grow and engage new audiences in new ways. For example, TikTok’s popularity accelerated with both users and public communicators last year, and survey respondents expressed excitement and trepidation about creating content for the platform.

One thing is for sure, it’s a busy but rewarding time to be a public communicator, and even the most seasoned professionals are learning every day. So we asked for your feedback again this year to help your peers learn from your experience. And roughly 700 of you answered,

sharing insights into the successes and struggles you’ve had growing your platforms and engagement. You’re finding new ways to represent and humanize your organizations and gain trust with your community, which you’ll see in this report. With your guidance, we hope other public agencies and school districts can better set themselves up for success in the coming years.



**Alix Bowman**  
*VP of Customer  
for Optimere*

We’re happy to present the  
**2022 State of Social Media in  
the Public Sector Report!**

## Where the Students Are

### How vital are your social channels in communicating with your parents and students?

**93.43% of respondents in education said that social media is essential to their communication with parents and students.** Respondents also found social media important for engagement (76%), critical response (61%), and employer branding & recruitment (54%) for their school district.

93.43% of EDU survey respondents said they use social media to communicate with parents and students. Parents are easy to find on social media platforms, but what's the best platform

to reach students? We turned to Statista to dig into platform demographics.

Only 5.6% of Facebook users fall into the 13-17 age range<sup>2</sup>, which makes it challenging to use to communicate with students. Twitter isn't much better at 6.6%<sup>3</sup>. These platforms skew slightly older, so they're great for reaching parents.

Instagram has slightly more 13-17 users at 8.9%, which isn't much higher. It does present an opportunity for higher ed institutions. 30.2% of Instagram users are 18-24<sup>4</sup>; communicators at public colleges and universities may wish to focus on this platform to reach students. Instagram adoption in EDU is slightly

behind public communicators overall (69.34% vs. 71.6%), so there's an opportunity to increase reach.

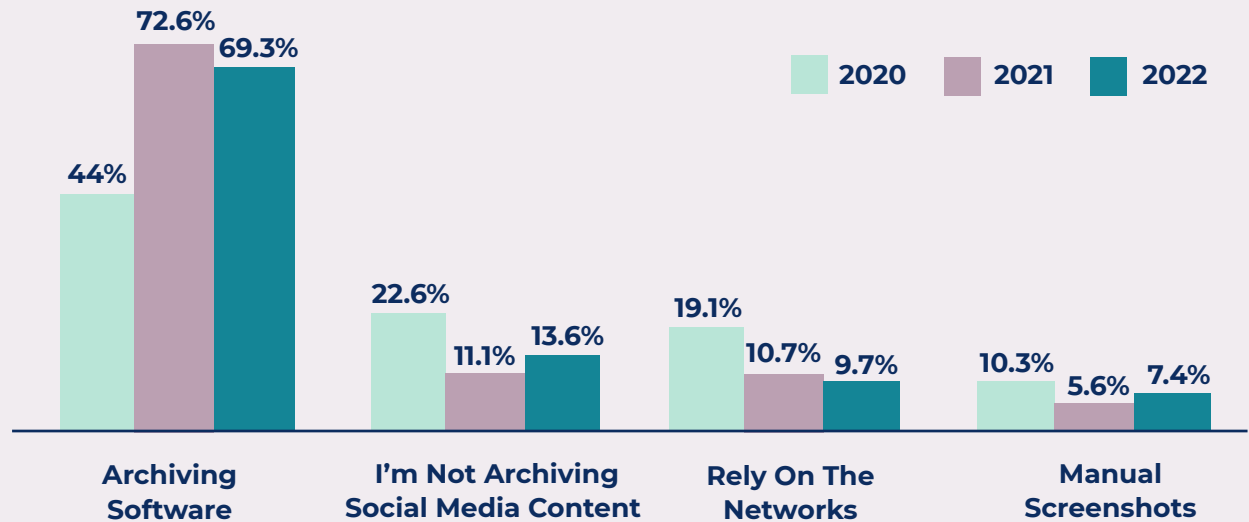
TikTok's user base is the youngest, with 25% of users between 10 and 19<sup>5</sup>. While this makes it the best place to reach students, there are regulatory issues with TikTok that could complicate adoption for your district. For example, TikTok cannot currently be archived automatically by any social media archiving solution, meaning any content or comment may be lost forever if deleted or edited, leaving your organization at risk of not meeting public records laws.

# Public Record Law & Requests for Social Media Data

Social media content is considered a public record in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. When you tweet, post, and share from public agency pages, that content is a public record and can be requested through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or records request. To comply with state records laws and to be ready to respond to records requests, eDiscovery, or audits, all social media content must be archived and maintained per records retention requirements. Unfortunately, the platforms aren't required to save this data for you. So without an adequate archiving solution that can ensure in-context capture with metadata, you're not only at risk of losing posts but also any edited, deleted, or hidden comments made on posts.

The survey revealed a slight but worrying increase in respondents trying to keep manual screenshots and not using archiving software. **The use of manual screenshots increased from 5.6% in 2021 to 7.4% in 2022, which could explain the increase in agencies not using archiving software from 11.1% to 13.6%.** Not only is the process of taking manual screenshots very time-consuming, but it's also unstable. Public agencies can't capture all deleted and edited content without archiving software, as it's impossible to manually stay on top of all activity on a page. Screenshots also can't

## How Do You Currently Capture And Archive Your Social Media Content?



**30.7%** respondents are at risk of not complying with state public records laws.

capture metadata or data embedded in the page. And without metadata, it's difficult to prove a screenshot record's authenticity or that it hasn't been tampered with. This means more than 20% of respondents may be losing essential records subject to public records requests.

And it's easier than you think to lose records. According to an internal survey<sup>12</sup> of ArchiveSocial's public sector customers in our archive, we found that **more than eight**

**million of 82 million records had been edited, hidden, or deleted.** That's roughly one in ten records that would have been lost without an archiving solution in place.

**1 in 10 chance of records being edited, hidden, or deleted**