

Microblogging: Share Your Family History Online Without a Blog

RootsTech 2019 Session # RT5219

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Sharing your family history online is the best way to find potential cousins, but you don't necessarily need a blog to do it. Family historians are "microblogging" their genealogy content every day using social media, video, audio, and other platforms.

WHAT IS MICROBLOGGING?

- Short snippets of information, memories, stories, or photos, most often shared on popular social media platforms.
- Well known examples include past RootsTech keynote speakers *Humans of New York* (<http://www.humansofnewyork.com>) and *Love Taza* (<http://lovetaza.com>).

WHY MICROBLOG?

- Platforms are free to use and easy to set up (much easier than a blog).
- Creating content isn't too time-consuming.
- You can post more frequently than with blogs.
- It's easy to interact with followers (readers).
- You can quickly share time-sensitive information.
- Platforms provide a good experience for mobile users.

POPULAR MICROBLOGGING PLATFORMS

- Facebook
 - Perhaps the best-known social network with the most users.
 - There are 3 ways to share on Facebook:
 - Personal Profile - posts can be public or for "friends only."
 - Public Page - share content publicly as a business or entity
 - Group - can be private for specific people or public for anyone to join

- You can create groups for family members or others interested in a particular research topic (i.e., “California Genealogy” or “Smith Family”).
- Allows hashtags, but too many hashtags lowers engagement. Use 1 or 2 only.
- Use the URL `facebook.com/hashtag/{topic}` to search for a specific hashtag.
- YouTube
 - The most popular video hosting site.
 - Owned by Google; it is the 2nd largest search engine in the world.
 - Has the biggest online audience after Facebook.
 - Recently began allowing hashtags in the video title or description.
- Twitter
 - Allows posts of up to 280 characters (including spaces, punctuation, and hashtags), but you can post in threads.
 - Hashtags that are very popular can become “Trending Topics.”
- Instagram
 - The preferred social network for millennials and young people.
 - Very photo friendly; uses interesting layouts and filters.
 - Accepts up to 30 hashtags in the photo description; more can be added in comments.
- LinkedIn
 - Lends itself to how-to and sharing expertise.
 - Users come from an educated demographic.

WHO MICROBLOGS?

- Researchers (such as David Allen Lambert and Debbie Kennett)
- Archives and libraries (such as Library of Congress and the British Library)
- Historical and genealogical societies (such as Minnesota Historical Society)
- Storytellers (such as Photo Detective Maureen Taylor and genealogical mystery author Nathan Dylan Goodwin).
- Vendors and marketers (such as Ancestry.com, FamilySearch, and Living DNA)
- Event planners and managers (such as RootsTech and The Genealogy Show)

HOW TO MAKE MICROBLOGGING WORK FOR YOU

- Try to leverage platform-specific hashtags (see section below) or live videos to gain visibility.
- Provide good visuals.
 - Use high-quality photographs and images.
 - Use photos that elicit curiosity or an emotional response.

- Use photos with sensory details.
- Be yourself and be approachable as you write stories.
- When using old family photos or records:
 - Think about the “who, what, when, and where.”
 - Include important socio-historical context.
 - Express what the photo means to you.
- Stories can be momentous events or sweet moments.
- To grow your following, focus on curating content of interest to your target audience.
- To encourage interaction, write posts that invite conversation.
- Re-share and comment on the content of others.
- Try using content scheduling tools like Buffer (<http://buffer.com>), Tweetdeck (<http://tweetdeck.twitter.com>), Hootsuite (<http://hootsuite.com>) or Tailwind (<https://www.tailwindapp.com>).
- Reminders:
 - Respect your followers’ time—microblogging can help you build a platform of expertise, but frequent self-promotion can be annoying and counter-productive
 - Remember to keep your genealogist hat on—attribution and accuracy still matter.

HASHTAGS AND HOW TO USE THEM

- Per Dictionary.com, hashtags are words or phrases “preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic.” Doing this makes the words function as a search term.
- A hashtag must be written as a single word, without any spaces, punctuation, or special characters.
- Popular hashtags (#) for family history include
 #adoption #ancestry #archives #cemetery #dna #family #familyhistory
 #familystory #familytree #genealogy #GenealogyBlogParty #genealogyphotoaday
 #genealogyresearch #heritage #history #home #househistory #memoir #nostalgia
 #oldphotos #photos #rememberwhen #research #shortstories #storytelling #tbt
- Use relevant keywords. Tools like *Hashtagify.me* (<https://hashtagify.me>) will help you find trending hashtags related to your specific topic.
- You can create your own hashtags to brand yourself or to help family find your posts. (Examples: #shareamemory #Crymesfamilyreunion)
- #Don’t #overdo #it #with #hashtags.

CONTENT IDEAS

- Share old family photos with the stories behind them.
- Share scans of documents with information about archives and data sets.
- Remember a day in history; share your personal experience or an ancestor's.
- Celebrate a current family moment with a new photo or an old one.
- Post photos of ancestors and explain why they matter.
- Share historical photos with the insight you have into that point in history.
- Post about what you are working on now. "Today I'm researching _____."
- Ask for help with a research problem.

OTHER WAYS TO SHARE ONLINE

- Apps such as *JoyFlips* (<http://joyflips.com>) let you share photos and videos online. Family members can leave notes, audio, comments, etc.
- *Famicity* (<http://famicity.com>) allows you to create a private place for your family to share current events and episodes of the past.
- *Storyworth* (<http://storyworth.com>) subscriptions send family members prompts; stories are posted on a private website.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Jeremy Riel, "Story Snippets, Ministories, and Microblogging," <https://medium.com/@jeremyriel/story-snippets-ministories-and-microblogging-636ce102441b>
- Maureen Taylor, "Take the Time to Discover the Story, Save the Story, and Tell the Story," RootsTech Blog, January 29, 2018, <https://www.rootstech.org/blog/take-the-time-to-discover-the-story-save-the-story-and-tell-the-story>
- Grasshopper Resources, "Buffer vs TweetDeck vs Hoosuite: Which management tool is best for your social media presence?" <https://grasshopper.com/resources/tools/social-media-management-buffer-tweetdeck-hootsuite>
- Priit Kallas, "Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites and Apps" <https://www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites>