



Second Century

Social Media — Friend and Foe

I enjoy starting every day with a coffee and a tour of the social media outlets that feature ham radio, from Facebook to Twitter to YouTube. I believe, in many ways, this set of tools makes our hobby a more enriching and enjoyable place, with the benefit of it being available on demand and as needed. It is just amazing to see the breadth of material available to us radio amateurs through social media.

Almost a year ago now, I reached out to 32 YouTube content creators who I wanted to personally recognize for their “giving back” through their videos. Some of them are famous in our community, like Tim Duffy, K3LR, at DX Engineering. Tim works tirelessly to bring three sessions weekly to his channel, featuring everything from ham radio manufacturers to innovators. Some of them are less known, like Steve Babcock, VE6WZ, who has produced some of the best videos I have seen on constructing everything from receiving antennas to complete remote radio configurations.

Like our radio signals that know no boundaries, social media is indeed a global endeavor. A couple of major standouts include Callum McCormick, M0MCX, who uses healthy doses of humor, technology, and experience to cover everything from antenna modeling and construction to operating. Also, Hayden Honeywood, VK7HH, whose channel seeks to educate, inspire, promote, and get people involved to learn about ham radio. This list of both regional and international ham radio content creators goes on and on.

Once you’ve spent some time with it, though, the dark side of social media quickly becomes apparent: Threads on websites and in groups that are beyond rational. Statements of “fact” on Facebook that just aren’t true. Facebook groups of like-minded individuals where they eat their own in progressively hostile posts and comments. YouTube videos that go beyond editorial into toxic. One of the greatest problems has to do with the fact that all of this is happening in front of the very people we are trying to attract into the hobby: our youth. There are no tags on social media that warn, “Show good judgement — minors are present.” As a result, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that young people, or new hams in general, are affected by the negativity and discord.

At ARRL, we are not distracted or discouraged by these outliers. There’s tremendous value in using social media to fulfill some of the obligations we have, to FCC Part 97 and to each other. You will see that we have been far more prolific on our Facebook and YouTube pages. You can expect this to increase. We believe that the YouTube content will drive more interest in what we’re doing as an association, as well as an extension to our educational benefits through the ARRL Learning Network and Learning Center!

You too have many opportunities for contributing to the good work being done on social media. Create posts from club events, share your experience as a contesteer, share pictures and videos from your holiday-style DXpedition, or even your tips on how to solder a PL-259 connector or bury a ground rod. YouTube also provides a wonderful place to archive and make accessible historical videos that may be sitting in a stack of old VHS tapes or 8 mm film on your shelf. There are endless possibilities — and we’d love to see what you’ve got! Tag us — #ARRL.

In closing, social media plays an important role in our future as a community, as we recognize that role and calibrate ourselves to leverage its strengths. Post your activities, experiments, successes, and stories on social media! Be radio active and connect with others to get them on the air too!

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