

# conversation

with Joanna M. Pineda



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*“Using social media for your apprenticeship program is all about talking to your target audiences—and people who are new to a program are the absolute best people to be talking to,” says Joanna M. Pineda, chief executive officer and chief troublemaker for Matrix Group International, Inc., in Arlington, Virginia. Pineda presented “Effective Use of Social Media and e-Marketing Tools for Recruitment and Engagement” at the 2018 Institute for Apprenticeship, Training and Education Programs. She spoke with editor Robbie Hartman, CEBS, about creating social media goals, strategies and editorial calendars.*

## ***What types of goals should apprenticeship programs set when embarking on the use of social media?***

The goals for your social media program should be in alignment with the overall goals of the apprenticeship program and any marketing or recruiting efforts. They should be to raise awareness, reach wider or new audiences, and attract high-quality talent. They also should answer questions or objections people might have about joining a program. To get there, you will have some subgoals. For example, if you’re on Facebook, you should have some goals related to the number of followers and the amount of engagement. You want likes, comments, etc. It’s important to set those measures. But you must always keep the larger goals in mind.

## ***How should organizations decide which—and how many—social media platforms to pursue?***

Get to know the platforms, get to know your audiences and then ask yourself: Where are our audiences, and which platforms seem to really resonate with them? Start with one platform, and really get to know it. Perhaps invest in outside training, take some webinars or bring in a consultant. Understand the nuances. On the face of it, a lot of these platforms are very similar. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are all about posting, being visual and having compelling content. It’s about getting likes and shares. They sound much the same, but the subtle nuances can be huge. Twitter

and Instagram are all about the hashtags—Facebook not so much. Facebook is closed for personal profiles but not pages. And Instagram really allows exploration because of the hashtags.

Today, apprenticeship programs should look at Facebook or Instagram as a starting point. Both are really popular and compelling platforms to engage and cultivate audiences. If you’ve got the capacity, choose Facebook or Instagram plus YouTube. A segment of the population really prefers video over text and is much more visual, so they will learn much better and be converted by video. Also, YouTube videos have a presence in search engines. For people who are researching information, YouTube is going to show up. And if you choose Facebook as the other platform, Facebook really favors video. So if you can, take the video you put on YouTube and upload it to Facebook as native video; this will help your Facebook strategy. It’s a win-win.

## ***What are the virtues of using video?***

Video is compelling. It allows you to showcase the people, training, skills and environment of your program in a way that text and even images cannot. It’s terrific for search engine optimization, and you can use and reuse video. You don’t have to spend a whole lot of money either. If you have a decent phone, start recording and interviewing people. Maybe invest in a small tripod. Sometimes we post a video without even editing it. People aren’t expecting super-polished videos. Talk to new apprentices and ask them: “Where are you from? What are your goals for the

# benefits

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program?” Follow up in three weeks: “What are you looking forward to? What skill have you learned?” There is something so authentic about someone who looks like your apprentices talking about themselves and the program, even for people who don’t know anything about the craft or profession.

## *What tips would you offer for e-mail marketing in apprenticeship programs?*

We have three tips for e-mail. The first tip is: Be short and to the point. People do not read long e-mails. Second: Mix it up in terms of format, tone and messaging. Sometimes send plain-text e-mails, and sometimes send e-mails that are more dressed up—with images or video. But always look professional, and be consistent with your brand and voice. Never use bad grammar or punctuation. The third tip is to invest in a marketing automation platform. These platforms have become very popular and can be inexpensive. They allow you to automate the tasks of communicating with and cultivating your audiences. Marketing automation platforms allow you to send e-mails based on demographics, time and actions.

## *What are some strategies for recruiting and cultivating apprentices with these tools?*

It boils down to creating a user experience that feels more personalized. First, think about how you can create an experience for an apprentice who is in high school, has been out of school for a while or is changing careers—whatever the circumstance may be—and then pick and choose different types of communication for him or her. The second tip is to avoid insider messaging. With social media, we find a big assumption that people are already familiar with an apprenticeship program. When you use insider language, you’re talking to the converted. But when you’re recruiting and cultivating, especially in social media, you’re talking to the unconverted. Many places have good program messaging about their program, but that doesn’t do anything for people who don’t know what millwrights or ironworkers do. On a regular basis, intersperse that content with information and infographics for the uninitiated. This also becomes great information for people who are converted to share with others. Third, be in it for the long haul. Know that nurturing and cultivation take a long time—even years.

## *Can you describe a sample schedule when creating an editorial calendar for social media?*

There are two elements. One is the themes and topics you’re going to cover in your e-mails, on your website and in your social media. In the life of a program, there will be dates for applications, the start of classes, open houses and graduation. Other times are thematic—There may be state or federal celebrations of apprenticeships. Create a schedule that takes into account the topics and themes that will be relevant to your program throughout the year. The second part is the schedule you’ll use to post about those themes and topics. Break it down by quarter, month, week, even day. You might post two video interviews a month, post on Facebook three times a week, be on Instagram once a day (three or four times a week) and send an e-mail communication once a month. That’s your schedule. Then, based on the themes and topics, decide what content to post across the channels.

## *Is there anything else you would like to highlight?*

There is a big emphasis on recruiting women. What messaging is going to resonate with this audience? What unsaid objections do you need to overcome? Think about the larger context we have today of women feeling empowered to talk about how they’re feeling harassed in different situations in their lives. You can only imagine that there’s a generation of women in construction, as an example, who have felt harassed or otherwise uncomfortable. That’s the unsaid message that’s going to prevent women from going into construction. Address it in really strong and positive ways. Don’t leave it unanswered. If you don’t address it, and you only talk about opportunities and money, you’re not overcoming that objection. Pay special attention to the messaging. You have to do things differently to address certain audiences, and you’re going to have to work harder. Why not have open houses just for women? Why not have special events just for women to show them this program has changed and is different? How about video interviews with women and girls talking about how these programs and professions have changed? Whatever you do, be creative and test and measure your results! Good luck!