JANSON
COMMUNICATIONS

Real Partnerships ▪ Proven Results

MILITARY FACEBOOK STUDY

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This document is a study of Military Facebook pages conducted and paid for by JANSON Communications. This study analyzed the trends, themes, and commonalities between Facebook users and owners. The views and analyses expressed in this study are solely those of JANSON Communications and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Military.

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WELCOME

In the last three years, social media has become an increasingly large part of the communications toolbox for the Department of Defense (DoD) and military services. While many military organizations have embraced this technology, most still struggle to find an adequate strategy and set of best practices to operate on.

DoD released its first comprehensive social media policy on February 26, 2010, directing that, across the services, the non-classified network's default setting would allow access to social media pages. With the release of this policy, it is anticipated that social media will grow as an effective and necessary communications tool for the military to tell their story and communicate their mission.

JANSON embarked on this study to take a snapshot of the U.S. military's use of this unique communications channel and examine the best practices and possible shortcomings of those efforts. With over 400 million members, and growing exponentially, Facebook represents a massive potential community for military organizations to inform stakeholders.

If you have considered starting a social media program, or have one that needs improvement, we hope that this information aids in your endeavor. This study applies not only to the military, but to any organization in government, business or non-profit, by offering a set of unique insights, strategies and techniques.

If you would like an electronic copy, visit our Web site at **jansoncom.com**. For any questions or media inquiries, feel free to contact me at 703.393.2500 or fwellman@jansoncom.com.

Sincerely,

Fred Wellman
Senior Director of Communications, Public Relations and Social Media

ABOUT THE STUDY

- The study examined the use of Facebook pages by the U.S. military to identify trends, best practices and typical uses of this communications tool.

- It was conducted over a two-week period between January 4th and 18th, 2010.

- We approached the study as fans, establishing a Facebook profile page for 'JANSON Social-Media' to view the pages from a user perspective.

- Pages were collected by first going to the DoD Social Media Hub site and the armed services social media home pages and following all of the pages listed.

- Simple search terms were used in the Facebook search engine to identify other pages using common military terms such as 'brigade,' 'battalion,' 'Marine,' 'Naval,' 'fort,' 'USS,' 'commander' and others.

- We limited our study to actual military organizations, excluding groups such as Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs, family support groups or small units.

- 682 pages were identified and entered into our data set using this methodology.

Of the data set found, the sample set was comprised of the following:

Agency	Percent of Total Sample
Department of the Army	70%
Department of the Navy	14%
Department of the Air Force	5%
United States Marine Corps	2%
Other Agencies	9%

The pages were divided into five categories:

- Personality Pages – Fan pages dedicated to or created by a specific person. Personality pages are typically representative of military personnel in positions of authority and/or senior leadership roles.

- Recruiting Pages – Fan pages owned by individual recruiting stations or organizations that are specifically designed to enhance recruiting missions, usually in a specific locale or for a specific specialty.

- Organization Pages – Fan pages dedicated to promoting military commands, departments, divisions or units.

- Location Pages – Fan pages dedicated to a particular base or military installation and its services and support to the military community.

- Group Pages – Group pages are meant to foster group discussion about a particular topic or subject matter (not included in this study).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the content of military Facebook pages from the user's point of view. When a Facebook member becomes a "fan" of a page, they are creating a very unique link to that personality, location or organization. By studying the usefulness, uniqueness and ease of use of the page's content, we were able to evaluate the return on that user's commitment. The study used DoD's and military services' own social media hub pages and a simple search to find 682 fan pages for examination.

## *Highlighted Findings*

The study found the following :

- 87% of pages had at least one form of contact information with a link to their official page being the most primary form on 71% of pages.

- Only 22% of pages studied had clear terms of use posted delineating what is acceptable behavior and comments on the page.

- During the study period 84% of military pages had no interaction with their fans at all.

- 4% of the pages examined had no content or had not been updated for several months resulting in "zombie" pages though many more were excluded from the study data set.

- Many military Facebook pages are not clearly marked as "official" and can be confused with the larger number of unofficial and "clone" pages that look like government sponsored pages but may contain inaccurate and inappropriate content.

- There is a clear correlation between the amount of interaction a personality page owner has with his fans and the subsequent number of fans who sign up for the page.

- During our study almost none of the personality page owners interacted with their fans either by answering comments on their postings or responding to queries posted on the page's wall.

- Recruiting pages attract fan interest with 89% of pages having fan posts with questions and supportive comments.

- Recruiting pages answered 1 out of every 12.5 questions or comments posted to their pages.

- 87% of recruiting pages had no Frequently Asked Questions posted to answer simple queries for interested potential recruits.

- On organization pages interaction with fans was also low with 72% of comments and queries receiving no responses from the page owner.

- The U.S. Marine Corps had the most total fans followed by the National Guard and U.S. Army pages.

- 74% of location pages did not contain any critical location information such as gate closings or Base Realignment and Closure updates.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Contact Information

Placing contact information on a page provides a crucial avenue for fans to contact the page administrator with inquiries. Of all the pages studied, 87% contained at least one type of contact information in the form of a contact person, address, email address, phone number or Web site (Figure 1). When examined individually, the most popular form of contact information is a link to the official Web site with 71% of overall pages doing so. On the other hand, only 8% of pages provided an official contact person (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Percent of Pages with Contact Information
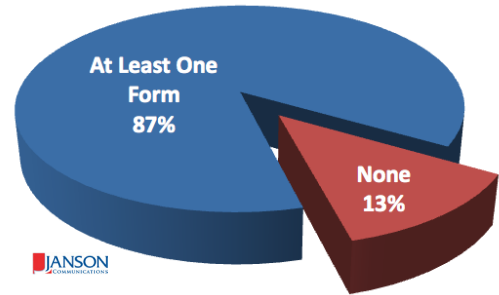
Terms of Use

For official sites, it is considered vital to include terms of use on a Facebook page, as it gives the users clear rules on what is and is not appropriate or acceptable use of the page. It also prevents accusations of censorship if user content or posts must be removed. Only 22% of pages studied had clear terms of use. Pages without clear terms of use often contained advertisements or profane comments/posts on their walls and in their discussion boards that were not removed in a timely manner.

Figure 2. Contact Information by Type
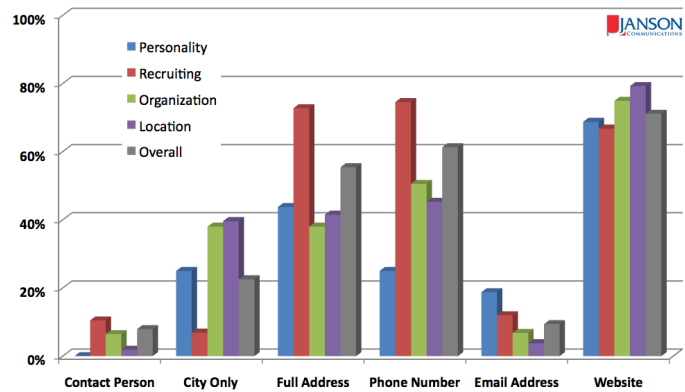
Fan Interaction

One of the truly unique advantages of using Facebook as an additional communication tool for the military is the two-way conversation and interaction that other traditional means of communication do not offer. Studies have shown that the "social" aspect of social media is what drives the explosive growth of this medium. For military Facebook pages, this means extra care is necessary not to use the page as just another internet press room for issuing releases and command information stories, but as a conversation with communities and a place to host conversations related to the mission. During the study period, 84% of pages reviewed had no interaction with their fans, and 33% of pages had interaction among their fans even if the owner never participated (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

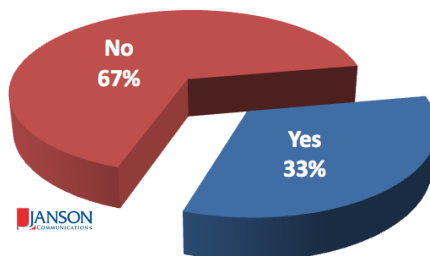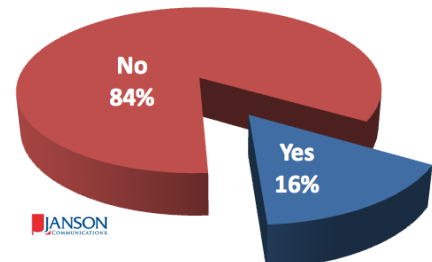**Figure 3.** Overall Fan Interaction

Figure 4. Owner Interaction with Fans

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Overall Content

Like any internet medium, content is king on Facebook. The channel has quickly become the number one medium for sharing photos, videos and news among friends and with fans. During our study, a surprisingly low number of pictures and other forms of media were found on many military pages, and 9% had no media at all (Figure 5).

Zombies

Most military pages were fairly active, although the change in the U.S. Marine Corps social media policy in September 2009 slowed the activities on most of their official Facebook pages. During the study, a number of "Zombie" pages were found—those that were created and then live in "limbo." Only 4% of the pages examined in the data set were zombies, though a large number were excluded from the data set after being found in our initial search. Just like in the private sector, pages are often created by early adopters and then go into suspended animation when that person moves on to another assignment (Figure 6).
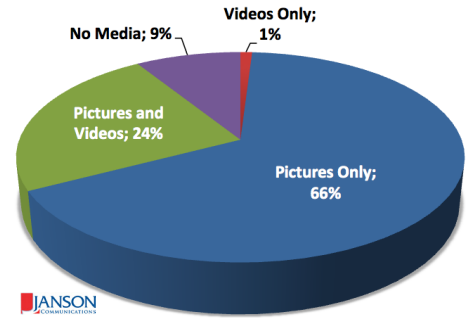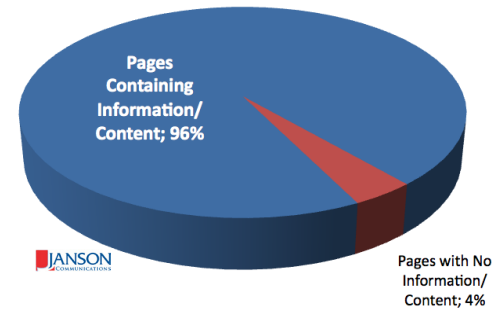
Figure 5. Overall Content by Type

Figure 6. Pages with No Content

Clones

A key piece of any official presence on the internet is clearly identifying that site as being the official outlet. The study found that an extremely small number of the pages clearly identified themselves as being "official" (Figure 7). There are hundreds of unofficial fan pages for military services, units, personalities and installations or "clone" sites. It can be difficult to sort the official page from the fan-created clone, as the two screen shots below for Fort Campbell, Kentucky demonstrate (Figure 8).

Figure 7 is the official page titled "Fort Campbell, Kentucky" and Figure 8 was created with the Military Basebook Application and is titled "Fort Campbell." There are many fan posts on the unofficial page which imply that confusion exists.

Figure 7. Official Page

Figure 8. Clone Page—Created by Military Basebook Application
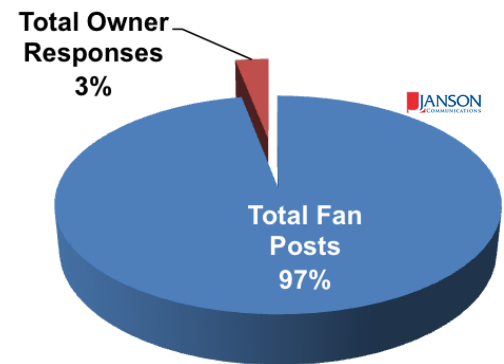
PERSONALITY PAGES

Personality pages can serve a range of communications functions, including being a spokesperson for the mission, or as an extended "open door" for the leader to gain feedback from their subordinates and communities.

Personality pages are used as both internal and external communications channels. Primarily, the 'personality' acts as a spokesperson to extend the communications outreach for their group, organization or location.

Interaction with Fans

There are several ways personalities can leverage their pages. Page owners with celebrity-like status can truly humanize their character with personality pages. Key to this is the unique ability of Facebook fan pages to foster two-way communications with fans for answering queries and responding to comments on posts. During the study period, almost none of the personality pages examined interacted with their fans (Figure 9 and Figure 10).
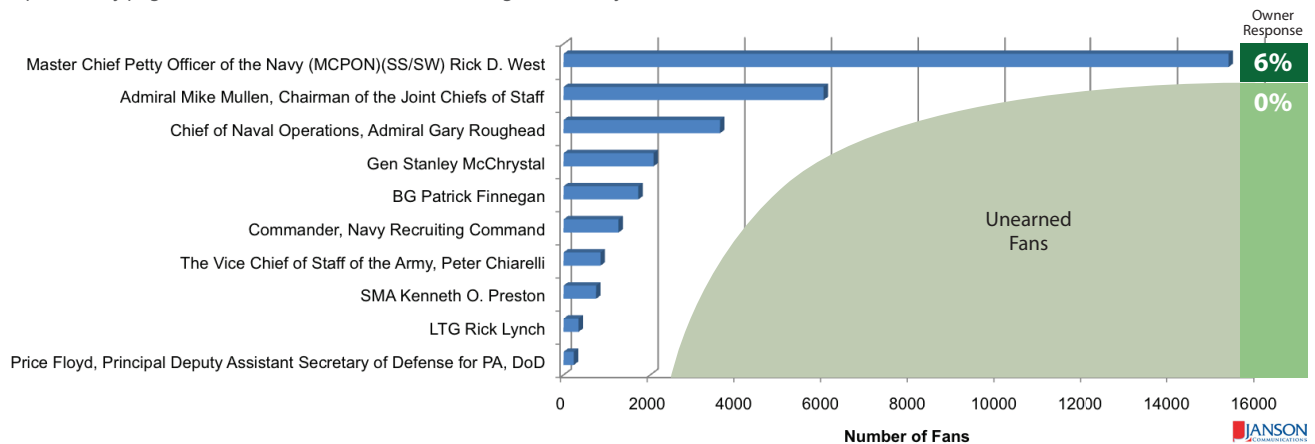
Figure 9. Fan Posts vs. Owner Responses

■ *Of the personality pages reviewed, 44% did not have any new fan posts and only 3% responded to queries from fans.*

Figure 10. Top Ten Personality Pages by Number of Fans*
Some personality pages have hidden their fan count including General Ray Odierno, and were not counted on this chart.


■ *On personality pages, the number of fans earned showed a correlation to the owner's response tendency.*

Contact information

Like many of the page types studied, real contact information was rare or completely missing on most personality pages (Figure 11). Contact information is especially important if the page administrator is not regularly monitoring fan posts or answering inquiries.

Figure 11. Contact Information on Personality Pages
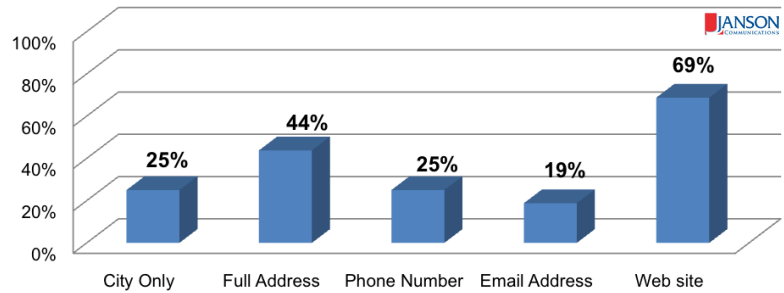

■ *Listing the official web site is the most popular form of contact information on a personality page.*

Post types

It was apparent that fans used personality pages to ask specific questions that they needed answered or to express general support. During the study, the number of personality responses to fan inquiries were very small. Most personality pages talked to their fans but did not engage them (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Owner and Fan Posts by Type

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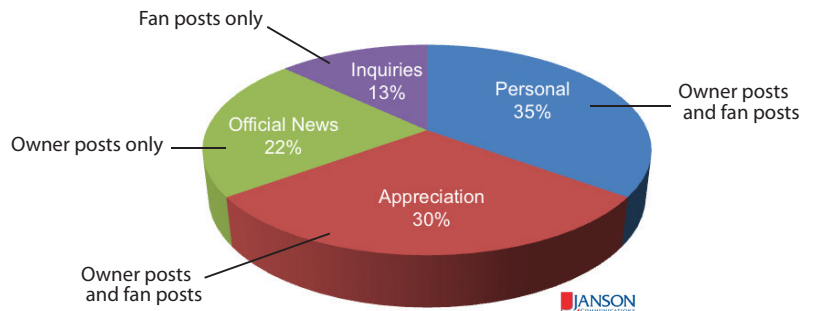
RECRUITING PAGES

Recruiting pages can be used to increase awareness for individual stations and organizations while providing a unique communications medium where many potential recruits are already active on the web.

Recruiting pages primarily serve to enhance the awareness and recruiting mission of the station and military organization. As a recruiting tool, Facebook provides a valuable avenue for recruiters to connect and interact with potential recruits. By design, these pages can be used to attract a more targeted audience at any time and location. The U.S. Army Recruiting Command has recently launched a comprehensive initiative to get recruiting organizations all the way down to station level to use Facebook, and the numbers in our study show the results of that effort. Many pages were brand new and somewhat under-developed or set up inadvertently as profile pages instead of fan pages. When contacted, USAREC expressed knowledge of this and stated they are working to transition them all over to fan pages.

Interaction

Facebook offers a unique environment for local potential recruits or those looking for specific specialities, such as medical careers, to ask questions of recruiters. Fan interaction is key, and by answering one question on the wall of their page, they may provide just the information another fan was looking for. It is clearly a place where potential recruits are willing to engage, as 89% of the pages had fan posts on their walls. Interaction from the page administrators was fairly low on most of the recruiting pages with responses to query measuring just 1 in 12.5 questions or comments posted (Figure 13).
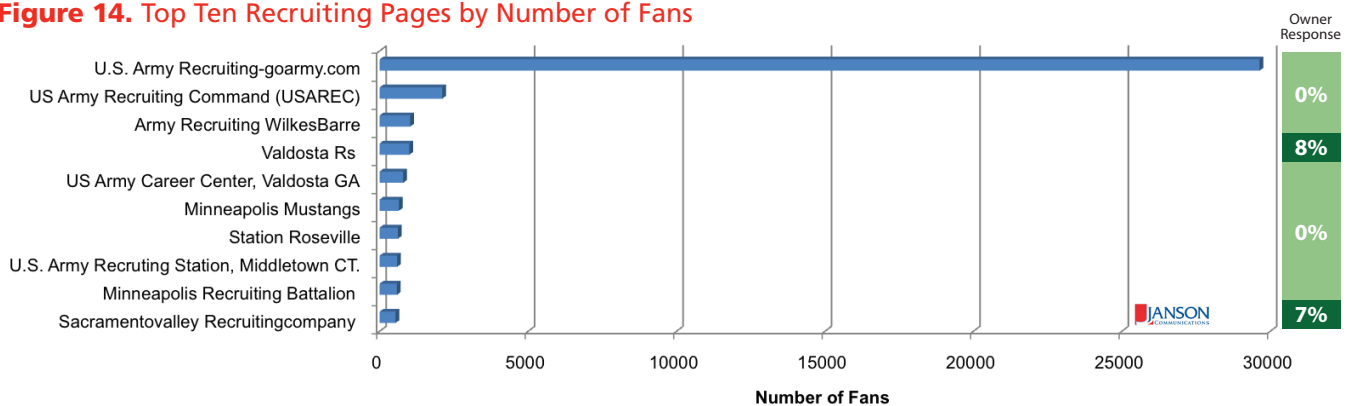
Figure 13. Fan Interaction on Recruiting Pages
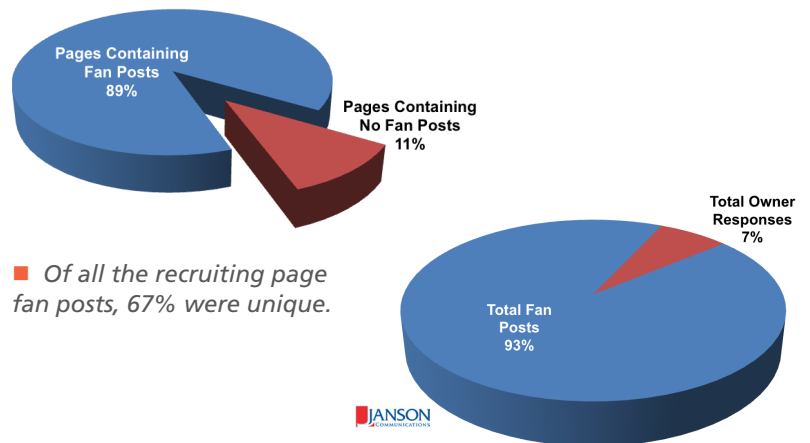
■ *Of all the recruiting page fan posts, 67% were unique.*

■ *On average, recruiters responded to 7% of questions or comments posted. Only 5% of the pages announced upcoming events.*

Figure 14. Top Ten Recruiting Pages by Number of Fans

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Contact information

Even more than the other types of pages in the study, contact information is a critical element of successful recruiting. In this study, most recruiting pages were doing better than all other types of pages in providing clear contact information (Figure 15).

Recruiting pages can rely on the full spectrum of Facebook tools to engage a wider range of potential recruits. Discussion boards, upcoming events and media posts can be as effective as wall posts to inform users about general recruiting news and events.

FAQs

Just as on the official recruiting pages, a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) can help answer many potential recruits' questions and local stations and commands can tailor those messages for their specific areas. 87% of recruiting pages do not post FAQs (Figure 16).

Events

Recruiting events or community activities by recruiters provide important opportunities for potential recruits and recruiters to meet face-to-face. By ensuring that appropriate upcoming events are posted and updated, recruiting stations can increase the event's presence among social networks and search engines. 95% of recruiting pages do not announce upcoming events (Figure 17).

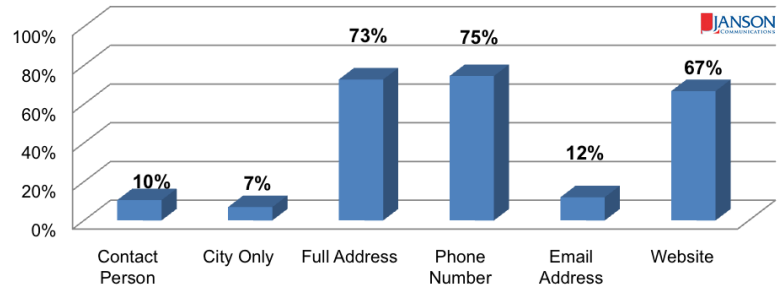**Figure 15.** Contact Information on Recruiting Pages

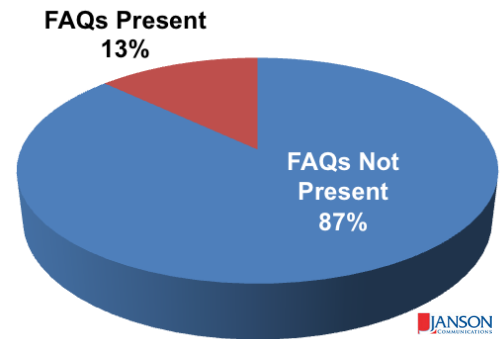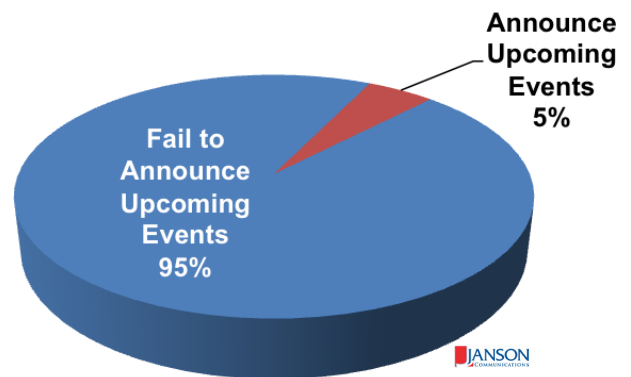**Figure 16.** Frequently Asked Questions on Recruiting Pages

Figure 17. Announcement of Upcoming Events on Recruiting Pages

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ORGANIZATION PAGES

Organization pages are typically used to improve awareness among users with a vested interested in the organization.

Organization pages are primarily used to improve awareness among users who have a vested interest in the command, such as members, their families and veterans. Organization pages provide a range of information including in-theater updates, pictures and deployment information to support cohesion in the unit, inform family members and build outside support.

Effective Facebook pages can create a uniquely open conversation and two-way communication tool for military units. To effectively engage users and encourage command advocacy, organizations can use their pages to provide content that is useful, timely and relevant, such as those listed in the table below.

User/Advocate	Typical Needs
Organization Members	Mission/Policy Change Motivational Stories/Pictures Command Points of Contact
Family Members	Upcoming Events Motivational Stories/Pictures Inquiry Points of Contact
Media & General Public	Exceptional Service Stories Behind the Scenes Information
Veterans	Historical Stories Command News

In this study, we examined 279 organizational pages for content similar to the above. From the sample set, we found that 77% of the organizational pages lacked information that addressed mission and policies (Figure 18 and Figure 19).

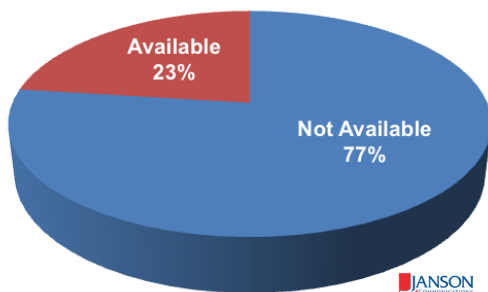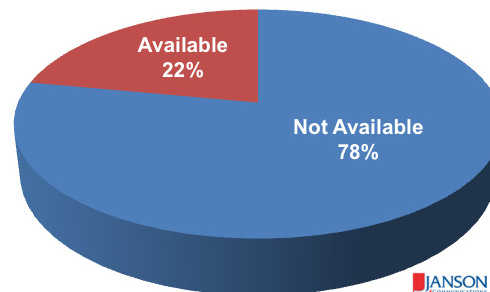**Figure 18.** Organization Pages Displaying Mission Information

Available 23%
Not Available 77%

Figure 19. Organization Pages Displaying Activities

Available 22%
Not Available 78%

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Contact Information

During our study, we found that organization pages heavily relied on referencing official Web sites as their primary source of contact information. Nearly half of the pages reviewed provided a phone number as an entry point to the command and only 6% of the pages viewed listed a specific individual as a contact (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Contact Information on Organization Pages
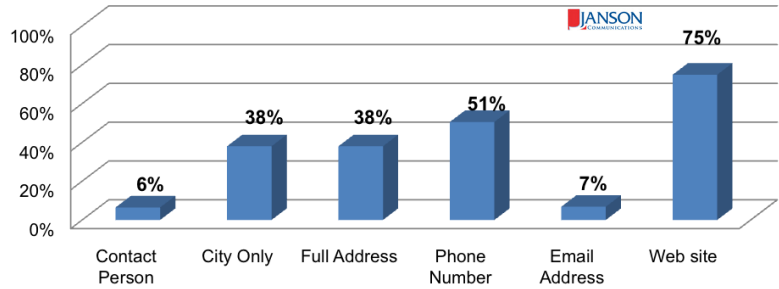
■ *Listing the official Web site is the most popular form of contact information on an organization page.*
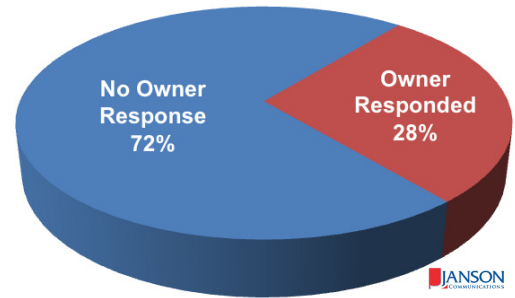
Number of fans

While not necessarily a measure of the effectiveness of a fan page, total fan count is a matter of "bragging rights" for organizations. Figure 22 depicts the top ten organizational pages for number of fans. We found that the largest number of fans belonged to the United States Marine Corps Official Page with 241,515, second was the National Guard with 224,623 fans and third was the U.S. Army at 152,958.

The U.S. Navy assumed control of what had been an unofficial page after our study had closed and currently has 84,173 fans putting them in fourth. The USS New York seems like an anomaly when it has more fans than the U.S. Air Force but this was driven by its recent launch after having been built out of steel from the World Trade Center wreckage and the associated publicity with its debut.
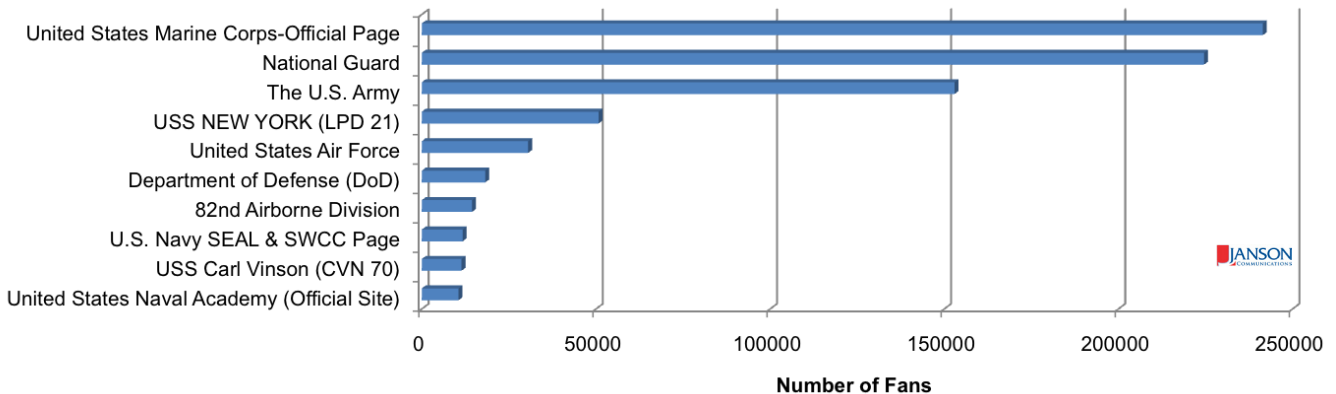
Interaction

Figure 21. Owner Response on Organization Pages

■ *Users interacted on 54% of the sites studied. In over 7,900 user posts, owners responded 28% of the time during the study.*

**Figure 22.** Top Ten Organization Pages by Number of Fans

LOCATION PAGES

Location pages generally focus on communicating installation services, support and events at the base or installation.

By design, a location page is an opportunity to focus on the base or installation and the community it serves. Communication efforts can highlight the services, support and events available to the user at the installation or location. They are also imminently useful during a crisis such as the recent blizzards on the east coast. The location page acts as an extension of the official installation Web site and as a "real time" host for community information. Although this category is one of the smallest in the study, it is a powerful tool for military communities and is showing steady growth as a primary tool to augment traditional command information strategies on many military installations.

We found that providing a centralized location for users to find real-time updates, news, and information, encourages user reliance on the page for information. As a result, fans use the page as their primary source of information specific to their location, such as gate closings, major exercises, weather information, and facilities on the installation.

Figure 23. Location Page Owner and Fan Posts by Type
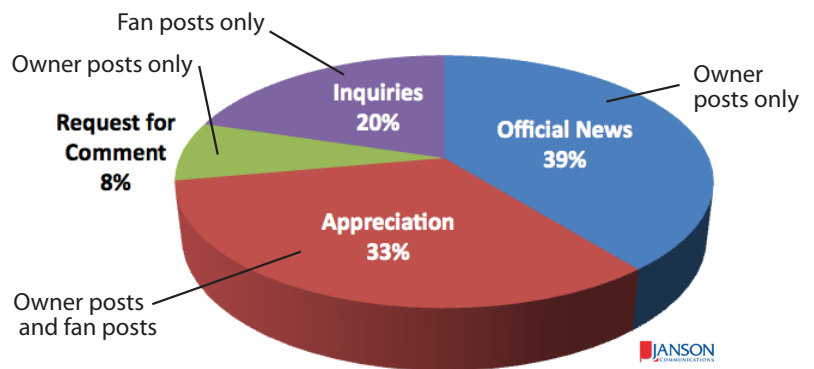
Information Content

While our study found increasing growth in the use of Facebook for locations, they still lack important information to build a larger community including upcoming events and critical information about the installation such as support facilities available, construction plans, and health alerts (Figure 24 and Figure 25). Using Facebook to augment traditional command information channels is becoming a standard operating procedure at many locations.

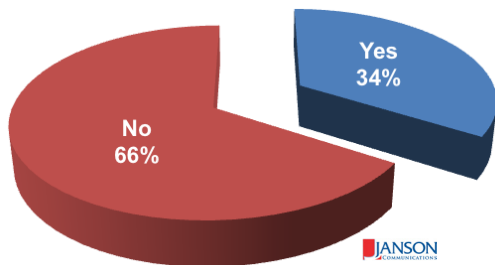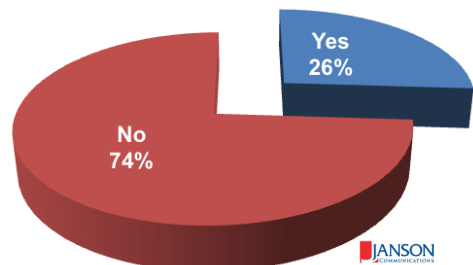**Figure 24.** Location Pages Containing Social Event Information

Figure 25. Location Pages Containing Critical Location Information

RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND LINKS

General Recommendations

Facebook pages serve as extensions of an organization's official presence on the Web. Based on our study outcomes, we recommend the following items:

- A military Facebook page should be clearly identified on the landing page as the "official" page of the organization.

- Terms of use should be clearly delineated on the information page to ensure inappropriate content is not posted to the page and is rightfully removed and violators reported to Facebook.

- Basic contact information, including a phone number or email address, should be available so that fans can contact the administrator for inquiries.

- Interaction with fans is a key part of the social media and Facebook experience. Military fan page administrators should make every effort to interact with their fans, answer questions in a timely manner and use the page to help build advocacy for their missions.

- Many organizations establish their pages without a clear content framework or management strategy or process.

- Pages should be set up so that the fan posts and owner posts are on the same wall instead of separate locations to better manage the page and ensure inappropriate posts are quickly identified and deleted by the administrator.

- Naming conventions should be standardized and easy to find.

- Military pages should be created as fan pages and not profile pages. It is a violation of the Facebook Terms of Use to create a profile page for anything other than an individual.

Conclusions

The use of Facebook as a key communications tool is being embraced by the military at a faster rate than in most corners of the private sector and well ahead of other government agencies. The military is undertaking the effort with great speed, therefore standardized rules are either non-existent or yet to be published. It is clear, however, that best practices are being shared and implemented.

Key Links

JANSON Communications...**www.jansoncom.com**

Department of Defense Social Media Hub........................**www.defense.gov/RegisteredSites/SocialMediaSites.aspx**

Department of the Army Social Media Page.....................**www.army.mil/media/socialmedia**

Department of the Air Force Social Media Homepage ......**www.af.mil/socialmedia.asp**

Department of the Navy Social Media List ....**www.navy.mil/media/smd.asp**

US Marine Corps Social Media Page................................**www.marines.mil/usmc/Pages/socialmedia.aspx**

National Guard Social Media Page ....**www.ng.mil/features/Social_media/default.aspx**