

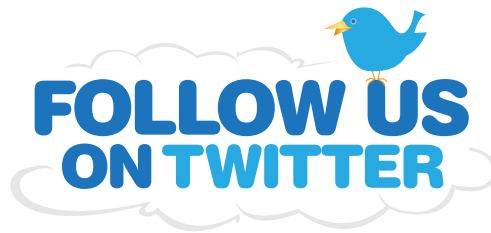
# Meet the Riley County PD's #TWITTERCOP

By MATTHEW DROGE  
Riley County Police Department

I read comic books. I love superheroes and anything geeky. I love movie references, pop culture, and things with character. I don't own a pair of plain dress socks nor do I think that bow ties are a thing of the past. I spend a lot of my time on Twitter, Facebook, and [Reddit.com](http://Reddit.com) and I was once an internationally awarded and published photographer and graphic designer. I happen to also be a cop, the original #TwitterCop.



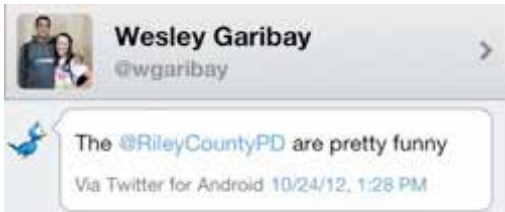
Droge



We redesigned our website ([RileyCountyPolice.org](http://RileyCountyPolice.org)) and started using Twitter and Facebook on a regular basis. So much so that our community started to ask who was responsible for the tweets. This (at the time) unnamed officer was dubbed the Twitter Cop and quickly we had community members trying to figure out this cop's true identity. This nickname quickly became the online and public speaking persona "#TwitterCop."

So what makes #TwitterCop and the RCPD's social media as successful as it's been (when compared to our jurisdiction's population the equivalent of approximately 14% of our population follows us on Twitter alone. This percentage rivals other jurisdictions in larger markets)? I attribute several things to our success and hope that other law enforcement agencies might be able to learn from us (as I did from the Kansas City Missouri Police Department, follow them and consider this my shout out @KCPolice).

**Being personable, real, honest, and know your audience.**

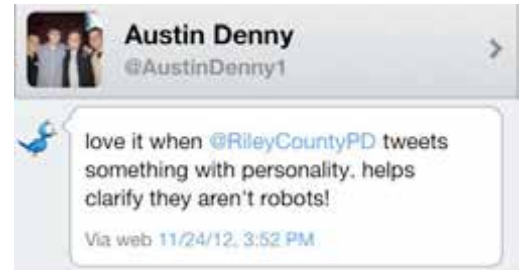


The Riley County Police Department started its Twitter account in 2009 and within six tweets it went silent. There were 53 followers when I was hired in 2010 and overall the department's online presence wasn't anything to write home about. My command staff saw this as an area that we could improve in and realizing that the majority of our jurisdiction was young (nearly mirroring the demographic of Twitter users); they decided to allow me and several others at the department the opportunity to breathe life into RCPD online.



I'm Mat Droge, and I am the Public Information Officer for the Riley County Police Department and I have with great pride accepted my current lot in life as the original #TwitterCop. I happen to be a cop, but I'm also a member of a great community and a self-proclaimed geek. Being true to who I am has been the foundation of what I consider to be a great career and a great social media program.

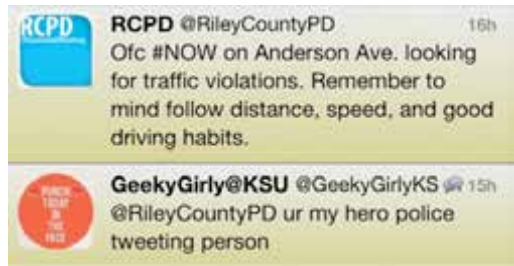
Currently social media at RCPD is handled mainly by me, but I can't do it alone. There is an officer (Ofc. Wilkey) as well as a sergeant (Sgt. Hagemeister) and several members of our dispatch center that on occasion have the ability to post to the official Twitter account (@RileyCountyPD). These people are a big part of our success and they can't be thanked enough.



Knowing your audience is an important part of the process. Our tweets may work in Riley County, but might not in another market. When tweeting or posting online, I try to keep things light hearted when appropriate, always professional, and never untruthful. I can't stress this enough, never tell an untruth on social media. This is a quick way to lose public trust and lying to the public isn't the business we are in. For example if RCPD tweets that we are running radar and checking for traffic violations in the 800 block of Bluemont Avenue, we are. Disinformation is not a part of our social media program and I take this very seriously.



# #TWITTERCOP: Dialogue builds community support



I interact with the majority of tweets that mention us and do what I can to engage our community to “Be Social with RileyCountyPD.” When I tweet, I generally do so in my own voice. I don’t try to sound like what some might think a cop would sound like. Along the same lines I do also vary my tone and word choice depending on the situation. A light hearted response to “what donuts are favored” at my department is very different than an announcement of an unfortunate or tragic incident.

**It’s not a building tweeting, it’s a person.**  
 #TwitterCop started as a “character” we used online, but it has become part of who I am and we are using this to our advantage. It’s not uncommon for someone to recognize me as #TwitterCop and we often get speaking engagement requests that specifically ask for me by that nickname.



I often tweet references from Dr. Who, Star Wars, Star Trek, or other movies and internet memes. We use our social media to communicate to the public and through doing so we are showing them that we are alike, we just happen to wear different clothes to work. This has gone a long way to build and maintain good rapport with our college student population. I often attempt to use humor or some sort of entertainment value in order to gain better rapport with our community as a whole and pass along information that may otherwise be over looked. It’s much more fun this way as well. Wouldn’t you rather read a tweet that calls our cops “#Copsicles” than just a boring winter weather advisory? This is a concept that is also used by @TrooperBenKHP with the Kansas Highway Patrol. He also suggests that social media posts contain a message as well as



an element of entertainment if appropriate (also a really great guy and should definitely be followed).

**There is a time and a place.**  
 Many consider our social media accounts to be entertaining, but they are just as informative. We tweet and post links to our press releases as well as weather warnings and traffic updates. This information adds legitimacy to our accounts and helps portray to the public the fact that we are professionals and qualified to serve and protect. It wouldn’t be wise to have an account with nothing but humor; this could damage the public’s trust in your agency. There is definitely a balance of the two and that line in the sand is dependent on your audience.



**Teamwork is key.**  
 It’s really a concept that is pretty short and sweet. Though I get credited for posting all of our tweets, it’s truly a team effort. Our account has the ability to post information 24 hours a day and this has helped to reach a wider audience. Though most of our tweets are between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, we often offer content for the night owls. I do a majority

of our posting but relying on my team to help give the community a more informative experience with us online. Tweets are often also scheduled outside of business hours and anytime I am called out to a crime scene.

One of the most exciting things we have started to do recently is allow our dispatch center access to our account. Has an accident caused traffic delays, but I’m at home asleep? Well, no longer is that a problem. This flow of information has also helped our communication with local media, as they regularly cite our social media accounts when filling their broadcasts or articles.

**Keep it fresh.**  
 Don’t let your audience become bored of your tweets. Be careful of tweeting too often or not enough. And make sure that your content is something that your audience cares about. I rarely tweet about things that the public wouldn’t have interest in and would suggest the same to other agencies. The account isn’t mine; I just have the honor of clicking the “tweet” button.  
 I’ve enjoyed this social media ride and look forward to being a part of more innovative social media in Riley County... Not unlike the time we allowed a college student to take over our Twitter account or the time that I job swapped with a firefighter from the Manhattan Fire Department.

