

Cafeteria Chronicles: Marketing Your School Nutrition Program with Social Media

School nutrition programs deserve recognition.

School nutrition programs deserve recognition. Using social media can be an effective way to promote the amazing work your team does to feed students every day. The **Healthy Meals Incentives** (HMI) Recognition Awards celebrated school districts making significant strides in school nutrition. These awards recognized the innovative approaches and collaborative efforts of school nutrition professionals who are dedicated to improving school meals. The school districts with these awards received national and local recognition through traditional and social media.

Here are some potential benefits of using social media to promote your school nutrition program:

- Establishes credibility among parents and the school community
- Builds excitement for meals among students
- Provides transparency in “behind the scenes” footage
- Introduces new recipes on your menu
- Collects feedback to improve your program

Understanding that posting on social media to promote your program might feel like another task you don't have time for, Action for Healthy Kids sat down with HMI Recognition Awardees and marketing professionals to gather simple and easy best practices to assist you when using social media. Let's hear what they had to share!

Action for Healthy Kids: Why do you think school nutrition directors might be hesitant to use social media to promote their program?

Michael Gasper, Director of Nutrition Services, Holmen School District: People will talk about social media and say, well, I just don't have time to do it. But the reality is I don't see how you don't have time to do it... Because getting the word out of what you do really makes such a difference in the perception of school meals.

See what content to capture and share in this [video part 1](#).

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Action for Healthy Kids: How has social media helped to build trust for your school nutrition program?

Michael Gasper, Director of Nutrition Services, Holmen School District: Let's face it, parents, most of the time, know about your program through the eyes of their children and they're not always going to be 100% honest about the situation. So, I think putting that word out on social media educates the community and provides support for your program in the community with the parents.

Action for Healthy Kids: After obtaining permission from district officials, what message are you sharing in your social media posts?

Jessy Sadler, Director of Nutrition Services, Urbandale Community School District: Our goal this year was to focus on storytelling, and we did a much better job this year than we've done in the past. I would like the community to know what we're doing other than just serving kids. Okay. But there's more to it, I'm trying to focus on good quality foods.

Action for Healthy Kids: Do you need any special equipment to capture content?

Marlon Gordon, Founder and CEO, NxtGen Network: You can create content with anything. So don't let any lack of equipment deter you from creating content to promote your program because it's as simple as taking out your phone and snapping a picture. *Please note district required media release forms will need to be signed by parents or guardians if any students are shown in photos.*

Action for Healthy Kids: How do you recommend dealing with negative comments, if any?

Marlon Gordon, Founder and CEO, NxtGen Network: One thing I recommend is being prepared for the comments. So, take the perspective of an unhappy parent or student, get together with your team, write down a list of all the things that they may see or all the things they may say, and come up with answers. Come up with a plan to respond. Always make sure that you are working with your supervisor to make sure that you are using the language that the district has approved to use. But I would say don't be afraid to have a conversation with someone who is unhappy.

Check out more tips for using social media in this [video part 2](#).

Action for Healthy Kids: For someone brand new to school nutrition, where do you suggest they get started with social media?

Marlon Gordon, Founder and CEO, NxtGen Network: First check with your district about any policies regarding social media. For resources on the topic, The **Institute of** This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Administration. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Child Nutrition offers tons of material that you can use for social media training. **School Food Handler** and **NxtGen Network** do the same. Find the training, spend time in the environment, and just start playing around. Start creating content. It's not always going to be perfect. You're going to make mistakes, and that's fine...so try new things and make mistakes and learn from the mistakes. But really, just become a student and have fun with it. If you're having fun making the content, people are going to have fun consuming it.

Now that you have a better understanding of how to use social media, with insight from school nutrition directors and marketing professionals as well as tools to get started, get out there and start marketing your program!

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