

State of Social Media

2023



Abstract:: It's a new year, and all the big players in social media are rolling out their fanciest updates. Well... most of them are. Some are undergoing corporate takeovers and federal investigations. Either way, savvy marketers should know who's who and what's what to build a successful social strategy in the coming year.

By our estimate, no human brain could successfully keep track of every news article, feature announcement and algorithm update, which is why we've carefully compiled the biggest ones. In addition to checking in on the giants like Facebook and TikTok, we also hand-selected a few up-and-coming platforms to keep an eye on.

No brand should be on every platform, but every brand should be actively producing thoughtful, high-quality content for at least one of these platforms. This official State of Social Media Address will help you decide which one(s) are worth your time in 2023.

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users around the world.**



Imagine saying the following to someone 20 years ago: “Elon Musk bought Twitter and, as a professional social media manager, I am unable to cope and stress eat the TikTok viral baked feta pasta.”

Surely you confused them at Elon Musk, but you really lost them at the pasta. If the current digital landscape has you feeling as hopeless as a 2003 marketer trying to understand that sentence, you're in the right place. Welcome thunder::tech's 2023 State of Social Media.

As of 2023, there are approximately 4.89 billion social media users around the world, making it a digital ecosystem that keeps marketers constantly on their toes. Around 22% of people struggle with the ever-changing trends and algorithms of each social media platform, making it difficult to maintain a solid strategy.

But with so many new features and updates, we can't blame them - but we can help. This easy guide is designed to help you keep up with the Wild West landscape of social media in 2023. Yee-haw!

The Fiasco:: Twitter

- **The Big Update::** New management and users jumping ship by the millions.
- **The Solution::** Stay the course - for now.

Let's get the big one out of the way first. Yes, Elon Musk has officially purchased Twitter, Inc. Yes, the media has jumped on the story of the takeover, subsequent company-wide layoffs and, by some measures, more than one million users deactivated after Mr. Musk took office. And yes, many individuals and brands are jumping on alternative platforms like Mastodon.

We agree, these all sound like excellent reasons to panic. But let's take a step back.

The long-term future of Twitter is up in the air. But in the short-term, brands need to remember that in the past two years alone we've navigated a pandemic, an insurrection, civil unrest and divisive CEOs and politicians. There will always be an Elon in our midst, and it doesn't mean we need to immediately abandon ship.

Brands, and especially their underappreciated social media

managers, have been dealing with societal situations like this for years. Savvy marketers know where their customers are and what they want to see. If you still have a large, active following, these people are listening to you - keep posting!

Our Take:: Avoid abandoning your users or diversifying into an up-and-coming platform because a news article told you to. Instead, if you aren't fully convinced Twitter will recover, start dabbling with an up-and-coming platform like Mastodon. Set up an account, make a post here and there and start growing your audience as a backup plan. The Twitter fiasco is definitely unusual, and we're interested to see how it plays out in 2023. But it's hardly the first crisis social media marketers have weathered in the past three years.



The Unknown:: TikTok

- **The Big Update::** Increasing concerns over national security could spiral.
- **The Solution::** COPE - Create Once, Publish Everywhere.

Who would have thought an app populated by dance trends and audio earworms would spur a national security threat? TikTok is immensely popular with users under 30, but it's causing quite the headache for the U.S. government.

To recap:: TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a company based in China. China's government is widely known for its use of surveillance, leading to concerns the government could breach U.S. security or spread propaganda by way of the app.

In 2022, individual states started banning TikTok on devices issued by the federal government. To avoid a full-on ban in America, ByteDance began working toward an agreement with the U.S. Council on Foreign Investment. But before an agreement could be finalized, an internal investigation found ByteDance was tracking the locations of U.S. journalists via their IP addresses. In December 2022, Congress passed a \$1.7 trillion spending bill that outlawed TikTok on nearly all government devices.

While this understandably sparked concerns about the future of TikTok, it's not as monumental as it sounds. Most popular social media platforms are already banned on government-issued devices. The individual state bans and federal ban are largely symbolic. In reality, the U.S. has strict free speech laws that make it hard to ban a company that isn't clearly breaking any laws.



However, even without a full ban, the new law may affect ad revenue and TikTok's reputation. After all, a bad reputation scares off valuable advertisers.

Our Take:: As the fastest growing social media platform, TikTok is simply too big to ignore. Continue to post on TikTok or establish an account if it makes sense for your brand, but repost your content on alternate platforms that offer short-form videos like Instagram (see below), Facebook and YouTube. TikTok rewards accounts creating a steady stream of content. Posting on other platforms gives your videos a second life and ensures a backup plan in the rare case some version of a national ban comes to fruition in 2023.

The Experimenter:: Instagram

- **The Big Update::** An underwhelming new Notes feature currently off limits for brands.
- **The Solution::** Get creative and keep the focus on Reels.

With two billion active users, Instagram ranks fourth among the most popular social media platforms - behind only Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. When you're already at the top, it's hard to make adjustments that enhance user and advertiser experience without angering or confusing your existing audience. So instead of a bang or a big overhaul, Instagram is starting 2023 at more of a slow trot. Meet Instagram Notes.

Instagram Notes are 60-character-or-less posts or messages that appear at the top of other people's direct messaging inbox. They can include text and/or emojis. When users post a note, your friends and followers see it for 24 hours before it disappears (similar to Stories).

This quirky new feature is available for personal accounts, but has not yet been made available to brands - and maybe never will be. But for



- 1 :: Perform a content inventory
- 2 :: Identify internal (and external) resources
- 3 :: Get stakeholders on board early
- 4 :: Set high-level goals
- 5 :: Document your plan forwards

With two billion active users, Instagram ranks fourth among the most popular social media platforms.

now you have the privilege of reading your friends' important messages like "I made pancakes this morning 🥞" or "Why can't I stop watching Emily in Paris?"

And... yeah. That's about it.

Spotlight on Instagram Reels

Meanwhile, back in the visual portion of the app, Instagram is pushing their Reels feature harder than ever to compete with TikTok. Short-form video has proven to be highly engaging and fosters the connection people are searching for online.

Users are looking to learn more information in shorter periods of time with huge bonus points from the algorithm for good storytelling. While we recommend cross-posting TikTok content if you're active on that

platform, it's still a good idea to create and post original Reels specific to your Instagram audience if you have the time and resources.

Our Take:: It's a bold move for a visual platform, and the popularity of the Notes feature remains to be seen. For now, brands are better off focusing on using the Reels feature to its full potential and upping their short-form video skills.

The Authority:: LinkedIn

- **The Big Update::** Actually, there are EIGHT big updates.
- **The Solution::** A little trial and error to see which new features fit you best.

Fun fact: Every six minutes someone is hired for a job they found and applied for on LinkedIn. Only 31% of U.S. adults are active on LinkedIn, but its influence can't be understated. While other platforms are playing it safe (Instagram, we are staring directly into your soul), LinkedIn is charging into 2023 with a laundry list of new features to increase its active user base and capture the attention of young professionals::

- Enhanced video accessibility features for better closed captions



Every six minutes someone is hired for a job they found and applied for on LinkedIn.

- New job title options in the field of accessibility (i.e. "accessibility engineer")
- Alt text options in ad campaigns
- Improved job search functionality catering to casual job seekers exploring their options
- Product pages allowing B2B companies to connect
- Post scheduling
- Enhanced analytics dashboard
- The ability to publish recurring articles on schedule - known as "Newsletters"

Our Take:: The two new features to watch are Product Pages and Newsletters. Now is the time to pounce on both.

For B2B businesses, LinkedIn's Product Pages have the potential to turn the platform into a highly beneficial sales tool, or at least a simple way to increase lead generation. Setup your Product Pages and keep them up to date with relevant information customers need when making a purchase decision.

LinkedIn Newsletters allow your brand to bulk up its thought leadership



with recurring articles users can subscribe to. When you publish a new Newsletter, subscribers will automatically receive a notification.

Find interesting, timely topics and write a few paragraphs each month to establish your brand's role as a thought leader. Just make sure you're contributing something new to the discussion. And remember to add relevant keywords to your Newsletter's titles, descriptions and meta tags as these articles can support SEO efforts.



The Friend-Who-Remembered-Your-Birthday:: Pinterest

- **The Big Update::** New year, new algorithm.
- **The Solution::** Take advantage of increased engagement and new features for brands.

One of our favorite activities is logging into Pinterest and pretending not to see the Wedding Inspo board we created in 2011 (Converse under the dress? Groundbreaking.). But the platform is making it easier than ever to engage with new and improved content thanks to a refreshed algorithm.

In 2023, Pinterest is getting personal. The algorithm is refreshing its data more often, providing increased pin recommendations more relevant to individual users. Engagement is up, mobile app usage is soaring and the repin volume for overall users increased 6% in 2022. Aw, Pinterest, you remembered we're really into crochet patterns for dinosaur-shaped tissue box covers? You shouldn't have.

On the business side of things, Pinterest is also making it easier for brands to exchange pins for sales with a "Shop" tab that allows users to find and buy products without leaving the app. Pins with high-quality photos and information matching search intent will get the most attention.

Our Take:: If you haven't already, now may be the time to dust off your Pinterest Business account. Add refreshed, high-quality product photos, descriptions rich with great keywords and easy shopping links accessible to users.

The Veteran:: Facebook

- **The Big Update::** In: Groups and short videos. Out: Organic Reach.
- **The Solution::** Act accordingly - Groups and short videos are the move.

If Facebook doubled down on its Groups feature in 2022, expect it to triple down in the upcoming year.

Most new features already announced revolve around Groups, including Group-specific Reels and expanded Group profiles designed to help multiple people run a Group on behalf of a brand.

Facebook will also continue to support its sister platform, Instagram, by increasing cross-promotion opportunities for Events. But if you don't already, expect to see more Groups on your news feed and even fewer organic posts from brands you follow.

With 2.9 billion active users, Facebook is still holding onto its sport as the most popular social media platform on Earth. Which would explain why, like Instagram, the brand will continue to play it safe as we move into 2023.

Our Take:: If it makes sense for your brand, now might be the time to put less effort into updating your brand's Page and instead curating a Group for your most loyal fans and casual enthusiasts. If it doesn't make sense, stay the course on Facebook, focusing on short-form video efforts.



The Rookies:: Platforms to watch in 2023

Social media audiences are fickle. The platform that dominated their attention one year may not even be downloaded on their phone in a few years' time. Just two years ago, TikTok wouldn't have even been mentioned in this State of Social Media Address.

It always pays to keep an eye on the up-and-comers. Here are our top three::



Discord

What is it? Discord is kind of like Facebook Groups meets Zoom meets Slack. Users create their own server on a community-powered voice-over VoIP application and send invitations to other users to join. Once on the server, users can communicate with each other through text, voice chat or screen sharing. Discord is all free of charge and has no limit on the number of users that can join a server.

Why is it one to watch? A few years ago, Discord was almost exclusively populated by gamers. Now, with 150 million active users each month, Discord has started to offer opportunities for brands to engage. By setting up a Discord server, brands have the ability to talk directly with their audience, organize forum conversations and run banner and in-video ads to a wider audience beyond their server. It's perfect for community building and management to establish brand trust.



BeReal

What is it? BeReal attempts to cut through the facade of curated social media posts by inviting users to post what they're doing via a notification that drops randomly once per day. If users don't have the power to choose when they post, they end up sharing more of their "real" lives and experiences and fewer posed photos. To create a post, BeReal takes a photo from the back camera and front camera to show both what the user is looking at and how they're reacting.

Why is it one to watch? For most brands, this platform may not be initially practical. After all, if you aren't at work, how can you post content related to the brand? It's unreasonable to ask your social media manager to BeReal outside work hours. But if you can make it work, BeReal can be just the thing for brand authenticity. Even if you can't make it work now, keep an eye on its features and updates. Its influence is already spreading as other platforms have started to clone its core dual-camera feature for their own users.



Twitch

What is it? Twitch is a streaming service where users broadcast a camera feed and/or screen share to a live audience that can provide commentary and interact with the user via a chat feature. Twitch used to specialize in video game streaming, but has expanded to include tons of different content. Many users now make a living off Twitch via its many monetization options.

Why is it one to watch? Brands can also capitalize on these monetization features, including advertising, monthly subscriptions and sponsorship opportunities with popular streamers. Twitch is also a goldmine for brands targeting specific and niche audiences. The platform has 140 million active users, many of whom sign on for gaming, music, sports, travel, hobby and entertainment livestreams relevant to their interests.

Quick tips for social media success in 2023

Before you jump on Mastodon, start a 24-hour Twitch live stream and upload every product photo from the past ten years onto Pinterest all at the same time, let's take a step back.

When planning your social strategy and how you'll adapt in 2023, remember these key tips for best results::

- **Start small.** There's no need to make every change all at once, especially with platforms your brand has been using for years.
- **Commit to platforms you know.** No brand should have a presence on every platform we've covered here. It's better to commit to a few platforms your audience uses that you know you can effectively manage.
- **Social media can serve as a supporting tactic for other business goals.** For example, brands looking to increase their domain authority and rank organically for specific keywords can use LinkedIn Articles and Pinterest descriptions to assist.
- **Some platforms play the waiting game.** While most platforms have new features for 2023, Twitter and TikTok are a waiting game. It's business as usual for now on TikTok and on Twitter if you have a large, active following.
- **Choose platforms with the best potential.** If you can't commit to following all three up-and-comers in our Rookie class, pick the one you think has the best potential for your brand and keep tabs on it. Pop in every once in a while to see if your competition joins the platform, what types of content are consistently popular and what creators your target audience is loving.

And if you can't commit to keeping tabs, don't worry - we will. At thunder::tech, we're on a mission to stay ahead of the curve and keep our fingers on the pulse of social media at all times. That way we can help brands navigate a constantly changing landscape and emerge victorious.

Can't get enough of social media tips and trends?

Check out our 2023 Social Media Field Guide next. Learn how to conquer video and face social media challenges head-on armed with a calendar of 650+ holidays & observances to boost your strategy.

Click [here](#) to download your Social Media Field Guide 2023

