

# Facebook Live: What we learned for Extension

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Like so many others, we're working from home, practicing physical distancing and learning a lot about how to engage our audiences remotely. Two natural resource Extension educators recently experimented with Facebook Live with a goal to test this outreach method with our respective audiences. We found that Facebook Live is a fairly fast, user-friendly tool especially if you have a history of engaging with your audience on Facebook. View the recorded events:

- [Winter Tree ID virtual event](#), March 26, 2020, 2:00 pm (30 minutes)
- [Get ready for City Nature Challenge](#), April 10, 2020, 12 noon (32 minutes)

## Diving in with Facebook Live

Like many, both presenters have personal Facebook accounts and are administrators on several organizational/group accounts. We found that the audience options differ depending which type of account you use to generate the broadcast. An organizational account allows audience restrictions by geography, but are otherwise public. A personal account can broadcast to the public at large, friends, or a subset of your friends.

### How to start a Facebook Live broadcast

1. Click where you normally do to create a post.
2. Look for the list of actions that can accompany your post, such as Photo/Video, Check in, Feeling/Activity, etc. and you'll see that one of the options will be "Live Video." Click that.
3. New features will appear, including audience restriction options. Click around to see what settings are available.
4. Check your lighting, focus, back drop, etc. and add a description of the broadcast in the comment field.
5. The large blue button "Start Live Video" will begin your broadcast.
6. When the video ends, click "Post" to share it as a recorded video on your Facebook page. People can view, share and comment on it as they might any other type of post.

In the same way that you can schedule a post to appear at an appointed time in the future, you can schedule a Facebook Live event ahead of time. The upside to a pre-scheduled event is that automated announcements from your page will generate interest from your audience. The downside is that you cannot join early to check to make sure you look good and your video/audio is working. Facebook automatically provides a countdown to your start time, and only after that, at your exact predetermined time, can you begin. It's a little stressful! Also, we learned that even if users request a reminder for the event from Facebook it can take up to 7 minutes AFTER the event has started for the reminder to show up in their notifications and prompt folks to join. Speaking of lag time, we also found that there's about one minute of lag

from the time the speaker poses a question until a comment about that question hits the Facebook comments, depending on everyone's internet speed.

We both found that having a filming support crew was essential, especially because we planned to move around a lot and handle tree branches and other natural specimens while speaking. Since we're restricted to household members to act as our assistants, we both used teenagers to hold the camera and monitor the comments for us.

Angie used her smartphone and used an unlimited data plan to broadcast from the woods near her home. She could log on to the correct Facebook account from her phone, but in retrospect realized she should have turned off the sounds on her phone because notification chimes were very loud on the Facebook video. Background noise can be a problem; you can hear both a train and helicopters in her recordings. She had scouted the location ahead of time, and the outdoor setting provided real specimens to demonstrate.

Andrea broadcast with an iPad from the front porch of her home to access the in-home wireless internet. She stood in front of a brick facade for the general comments and walked over to her front tree to demonstrate the use of the app iNaturalist. Surprisingly, showing the app on her phone came through the iPad video adequately to illustrate which buttons to click. Based on Angie's experience, Andrea used the "Do Not Disturb" setting on her iPad to silence incoming notifications. Neighborhood noise proved a real distraction including garbage trucks, passing cars, and gawking dog walkers.

We've learned from working with professional videographers that a little bit of movement in a video can really improve engagement, too much can be distracting, and not enough becomes boring...so finding a good balance is the trick. What's more, weather and sun/shadows are tricky when filming outside. An overcast day is ideal, but since that can't be scheduled, actively working to manage the shadows while videoing is critical. Distinguishing the twigs from the rest of the background was much harder on video than expected; so providing a backdrop to help the camera autofocus on the desired subject provided much needed contrast. Andrea used her hand since she was close up, Angie used a white pillow case which was larger and quite portable, though required another assistant to hold in place. Note that zooming in with the camera results in a low resolution image; you'll get much better video quality by walking closer to the object and holding the camera still for a few seconds.

While you're broadcasting, you can remind your viewers to invite their Facebook contacts to view the event, and we suspect that the more likes, comments, views and shares a video gets the more that Facebook algorithms elevate it. The conversation that takes place within the comments can be great but it's nearly impossible to manage videoing, presenting content and navigating comments all at the same time. Online co-workers who watched the broadcast in real time, as we'd pre-arranged, were invaluable in adding links and answering questions live in the comments. Comments are saved and stay with the video as it lives on Facebook so it's worth the effort to include resources in the comments.

### Tips for Facebook Live

1. **Practice, practice, practice.** When firing up a Live post, notice at the top left of the screen you can select your audience by clicking the upside down triangle and under “Who can see your post” and choose “Only me.” Then you can experiment with lighting and audio, and then just delete instead of sharing the post. No one viewed your practice, so there’s no awkward practice footage to live forever. You can also try a dry run with friends and family on your personal account to test your data/wifi connection, audio, and lag times for comments. Check out Angie’s [Practice Winter Tree ID Facebook Live](#) on her personal account.
2. **Have help in the field.** If you’re planning to move around at all, you’ll want someone else to hold the camera/phone for you. This person can help monitor comments, too.
3. **Have more help in the wings.** It is really helpful to share links to resources during the Live event as you talk about them, but that’s hard to do on your own. Get the links ready ahead of time, and ask a coworker to share the links as you present.
4. **Know the limitations of your equipment.** The camera on your phone is great, except when it isn’t. Zooming in creates low-quality resolution, so bring your camera closer to the subject whenever possible. Also, details can be hard to see on a busy background, so have a plan for making sure the camera's autofocus zeros in on the correct thing, such as holding a hand or clipboard behind a tree branch.
5. **Limit noisy interruptions.** Try to get away from sources of loud noise like roads and wind. And don’t forget to turn off your notifications!
6. **Check your service.** If you’re using a smartphone to do a Facebook Live, be sure to confirm cellular service from all the locations you’ll be shooting, and make sure you won’t get dinged for data overages.
7. **Account for lag.** Viewers may not join your live video until several minutes after you begin and there may be a lag before you can see comments viewers submit. Plan for this by having discussion points ready to fill in while you’re waiting.
8. **Make the algorithm work for you.** Encourage engagement—if more people interact with your event, it’s more likely Facebook will push it out to a wider audience. Stir up a buzz a day or two before you go Live, and ask viewers to “Share” the Live video to their network.
9. **Be real and have fun!** Facebook Live is perfect for a more casual (but still professional) tone. Let people see the real you, and embrace the imperfections of non-scripted video. Your audience will appreciate it and provide helpful feedback—really!

### How does Facebook Live stack up to other video formats?

In November of 2013 Angie checked out Extension’s video kit, and with the help of an Extension AFNR educator-turned-temporary-videographer created these two videos: [Bittersweet ID for Crafters Long](#) (2,616 views) and [Short](#) (1,657 views). That was her first experience trying to do professional education videos. She learned lots, but most importantly she learned she’s not a

videographer, not a video editor and there's a reason those are specialties and careers all by themselves! That's not to say these videos aren't good—they are. People watched them and, because they reached out, we know that some folks learned and changed their behavior as a result of them. But there are two because she couldn't make up her mind about length or the most important content. It's very hard to zoom in on specific details even with the good cameras on mobile devices. She also learned she doesn't like video editing and it's hard work.

So then Angie got some grant money and hired a videographer—wow what a difference! [Defeating a killer vine: Oriental bittersweet management](#) came out in July of 2015 and has 27,322 views! While working with a pro she learned about [storyboarding](#): the art and science of intentionally combining the video image with the educational message. Carefully crafting that message and doing the audio recording with high quality equipment in a sound studio makes it much better, but also takes skill and equipment we don't have. She's now done about 10 videos with a professional (sometimes several professionals, because shots from different angles makes for better video) and wholeheartedly recommends it. But it takes funding, time and, we now realize, access to people. She has one video production that's on hold because the videographer can't get good shots of the people that we need due to COVID-19.

### **Making FB Live events educational**

While it's fun and engaging to whip out a Facebook Live video event, in Extension we want to ensure that we're actually meeting our educational goals, too. We identified a couple considerations on this front.

First, consider how long the finished event will be. Given the start up lag time, where people are just finding out about your event and joining for the first 5 to 15 minutes, a ten-minute Live event may not be effective. Especially if your message will be short, ask yourself how important it is that there be a live audience at all. If you're not going to interact with the audience any way, perhaps a pre-recorded video that you upload to your Facebook page would do just as well and allow the flexibility for retakes while decreasing your performance pressure.

As you would with any educational outreach effort, apply all the standard educational best practices: Who is your audience? What are the intended outcomes? Clearly state your goals and objectives in your advance recruitment as well as during the broadcast itself. Andrea's goals were to generate interest in the upcoming City Nature Challenge event and drive registration for an upcoming Zoom webinar about the event, not impart specific natural resource content.

### **Evaluating Facebook Live events**

Facebook provides a couple of metrics to help you get a sense for the reach of your Live event. During Andrea's broadcast, the Facebook counter showed that 26 people were watching at the peak. When the event ended, Facebook reported that 337 people were reached in some way by the broadcast. Two days later, that number had jumped to 1061. Even if you have good viewership during the broadcast, the recording will likely gain even more eyeballs in the days to

come. While these numbers are satisfying, they only reflect passive awareness of the event. “Engagements” -- the number of people who clicked somewhere within the broadcast page, indicating some level of action and interest -- are more indicative. In Andrea’s case, 130 engagements were reported immediately after the event ended, and two days later there were 574. Pretty good for a 30-minute experiment! Engagements still don’t rise to the level of achieving impacts as we aim for in Extension, but they can still serve a purpose.

Perhaps the greatest benefit to using Facebook Live as an Extension outreach tool is its ability to provide informal and informative connections with our audiences while we are unable to gather in person. They require less upfront investment, and due to their relatively short shelf-life, allow us to experiment and have a little fun. While we are enduring a global pandemic, it’s good to remind our audiences that their beloved Extension programs haven’t forgotten them, and program teams are still at work helping them connect with the University, with each other, and with nature. The informality may blur the lines of professional and personal, but we are okay with showcasing that we are all multifaceted humans. Angie’s “bear hunt” reference and bigfoot sighting along with Andrea’s on-air claim that doing a FB Live qualifies her as a reality star are good examples of mixing a little fun into this educational format. Angie’s son swinging on a grape vine might have blurred those lines plenty, too!

So during this time of virtual audience engagement, Facebook Live can be a great tool to engage our audiences and deliver quality education. We need to be professional and remember all we know about our audiences and educational methods, but then I think we can be real, include our household members and try to bring a little joy into this uncertain world. If the subject gets a lot of attention, maybe a better, high quality professional video or full blown webinar can follow when we have time and resources to do them well. For any subjects that don’t get a lot of attention, move on, try something new, get better, learn and apply that new knowledge in the future.