

**HFA:** Iowa Finance Authority  
**Nominee:** @IowaFinance – Social Media Outreach  
**Category:** Creative Media

### Entry Description

The Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) established a Twitter account in February 2009 to communicate with the media and other constituent groups, and to be a part of the conversation about the housing industry, serve as a resource, and maintain a superior level of transparency.

IFA has monitored social networks via news alerts and clippings serves for many years but wanted to be a part of the conversation in the electronic medium. The Obama Administration is known as the first “social media” administration because of its presence on various networks. It encourages other government agencies to create a social media presence to increase transparency, especially now as state and federal agencies are doling out federal stimulus funding.

Our communications staff is fortunate to have the freedom to implement new ideas. After we launched the Twitter account we sent email to staff announcing it, explaining how it benefited the agency and encouraging staff to follow to follow us on Twitter. We also included instruction for following us in our monthly newsletter, submitted the information to other state newsletters and added a “follow us” icon to our Web site and e-mail signatures.

We have since kept staff informed of our Twitter presence by sending occasional updates. We also include a monthly “Twitter re-cap” for our Board of Directors to keep them informed of Twitter posts related to our agency. The reaction from staff and board members was mostly neutral at first, but with persistent Twitter updates at each board meeting, along with samples of our Twitter correspondence, we are gradually seeing more and more board members and staff taking an interest in this new social medium.

Our efforts have yielded great success. We currently have more than 800 Twitter followers, positioning ourselves as *the* expert agency on affordable issues housing in Iowa. Our followers range from Iowa legislators, IFA board members, staff, real estate agents, lenders, potential homeowners, media and professionals from all facets of the housing industry, among many others. Twitter has allowed us to build and strengthen partnerships between both organizations and individuals.

All forms of media use Twitter to generate story ideas. On at least five occasions we have successfully pitched story ideas via Twitter, generating excellent media coverage for our agency.

With our wide-range of programs, it’s rare that we have a chance to interact with all of our audiences at one time. On Twitter, we can almost instantly promote programs new and updates to a wide ranging audience.

Because it’s crucial to *correspond* in Twitter, and not just promote our programs and services, our twitter content ranges dramatically depending on that day’s housing-related discussion in the “twittersphere.” We provide resources to housing industry news, answers to inquiries, post public comment periods, request for proposals, ask Iowa housing trivia questions, link to news releases and much more. Our profile can be viewed at: <http://twitter.com/iowafinance>

Sending a tweet takes a matter of seconds as opposed to sending a news release or lining up a news conference or even sending an e-mail. Cost is measured in staff time, and the time efficiency is approximately a saving of 80% over conventional methods. Our two communications staff have twitter open on tabbed internet browsing all day. It only takes a few seconds to check occasionally and tweet while you work. With a tweet, you have control of the message as opposed to someone else's slant on a news conference or story. Twitter is one of our favorite modes of communication.

We have received a great response from our use of twitter. National and local organizations and individuals have both told us they appreciate that we correspond via twitter regularly and have noted the increased transparency of our organization. We regularly receive "#Follow Friday" recommendations, re-tweets and replies. A sample of these is included.

Receiving a #followfriday recommendation is a great compliment. Twitter users that recommends you are telling all their followers that they feel you are worthy of following and that you share great content. This can substantially increase your reach on twitter, because with every #followfriday recommendation you gain new followers. The "#" in front of #followfriday is a hashtag that will group all #followfridays together, so if you were to search for #followfriday you would see everyone that was recommended.

IFA uses the hashtag tool in a variety of ways. We have created several of our own, including "hiconf" for our 2009 HousingIowa Conference. We use this after each tweet in relation to the conference, so if someone sees one tweet about it, and are interested in what else we, or someone else has tweeted about, they can easily pull up the record. Hashtags are also commonly used in live-tweeting, which we will do from our conference in September.

A re-tweet works on the same premise. If you tweet something interesting, your followers may re-tweet it, sharing it with their followers. Our news releases and links to interesting happenings within our programs almost always get re-tweeted. This allows us to reach an audience we never have before.

Not only does our activity on twitter allow us to correspond with a substantial number of users, but it also allows us to monitor what's being said about our issues related to our agency. Member's of IFA's staff often participate in housing panels, presentations and conferences, and while we know what presentation they are giving, previously we didn't know what the audience was taking away from it. With twitter, we can monitor exactly what audience members are "live tweeting" from the audience as the presentation is being given. This gives us the opportunity to respond instantly if something was taken out of context.

Any organization can set up and maintain a twitter account with even a basic knowledge of the network. It's easy, fast, results driven...and fun!