

The Art of the Tweet-Along

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We can all agree that social media is here to stay in the justice and public safety realm, but how do we make the most of it? This is really today's burning question.

One great way law enforcement can use social media is to conduct a "tweet-along," which is like the more familiar citizen ride-along but uses Twitter. As most sheriffs do, Johnson County provides residents who complete our Citizen Academy a ride-along so they can see what a day in the life of a patrol deputy is really like. We also understand that in most communities, allowing 2,000 people to ride along in a single day would be laughable. But as long as we are willing to think differently and look at the tools we have differently, then why couldn't we give 2,000 or even 200,000 people a ride-along with our agency?

This is where the tweet-along was born—not out of necessity but of innovation. The tweet-along requires only a few things. First, you must have a deputy or civilian who is trusted and has the necessary knowledge and skill strength in social media. In our office, this best comes in the form of our public information officers. Second, that staff member or team needs a smart phone and/or a computer to conduct the tweet-along. The third requirement is a couple of hours of their time.

The Prep

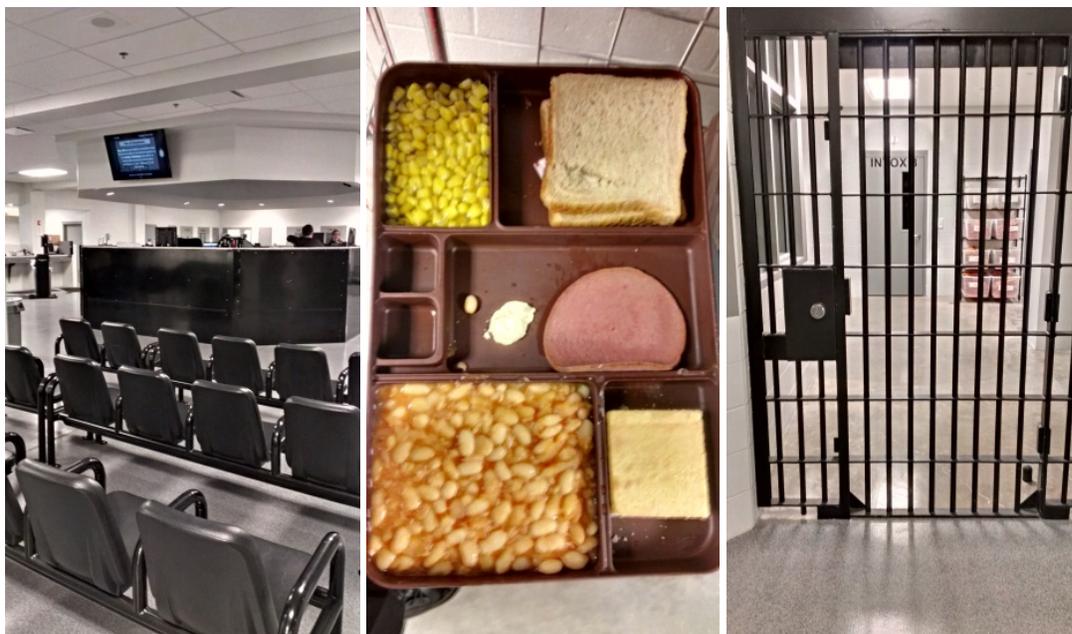
Like all things social media, you must have a following for any outreach to work, and this applies to the tweet-along as well. So take some time and get your Twitter following up to a number you think will represent enough people listening to make it worth the event. This can be as few as a couple of hundred followers. You also need to make sure the overall sentiment among your followers is that of support (mostly) for what you do. You can expect a few people to be naysayers during your event but, hey, we have these people in our daily lives, so we should really expect nothing less online.

In Johnson County, we came to the conclusion that a tweet-along from the streets had been done before. So, although we will embark on that journey eventually, too, we decided to be out front and do a tweet-along from inside the jail. So that's where we went, straight to jail.

We scheduled the event for 3 hours, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. on a Thursday evening. Why Thursday? Because it is one of our busiest times, when we have the most court commitments on top of the normal fresh arrests. Why 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.? Taking into account the vast majority of people's schedules, this is the prime time when interested area residents would be at home and have the time to check their social media accounts and participate in the event.

Prior to the event, our Public Information Officer created a hashtag, #jocotweetalong, and promoted the event with the local media, on the official Johnson County Sheriff’s Office social media sites, and on the agency website. We also went into the jail and took photos with a smart phone of areas and items that we thought would be useful to show and that people would be interested in seeing. (See examples in Figure 1.) These included photos of the booking area, a meal tray, the inmate uniform, a housing unit, and other views. The photos became fundamentally valuable during the event, especially the meal tray.

Figure 1. Tweet-Along Views of the Johnson County Jail



We follow policies concerning inmate and staff privacy, as do most agencies. Therefore, none of the photos featured inmates or staff, and none of our tweets used any inmates’ or staff members’ names.

The Live Tweet-along

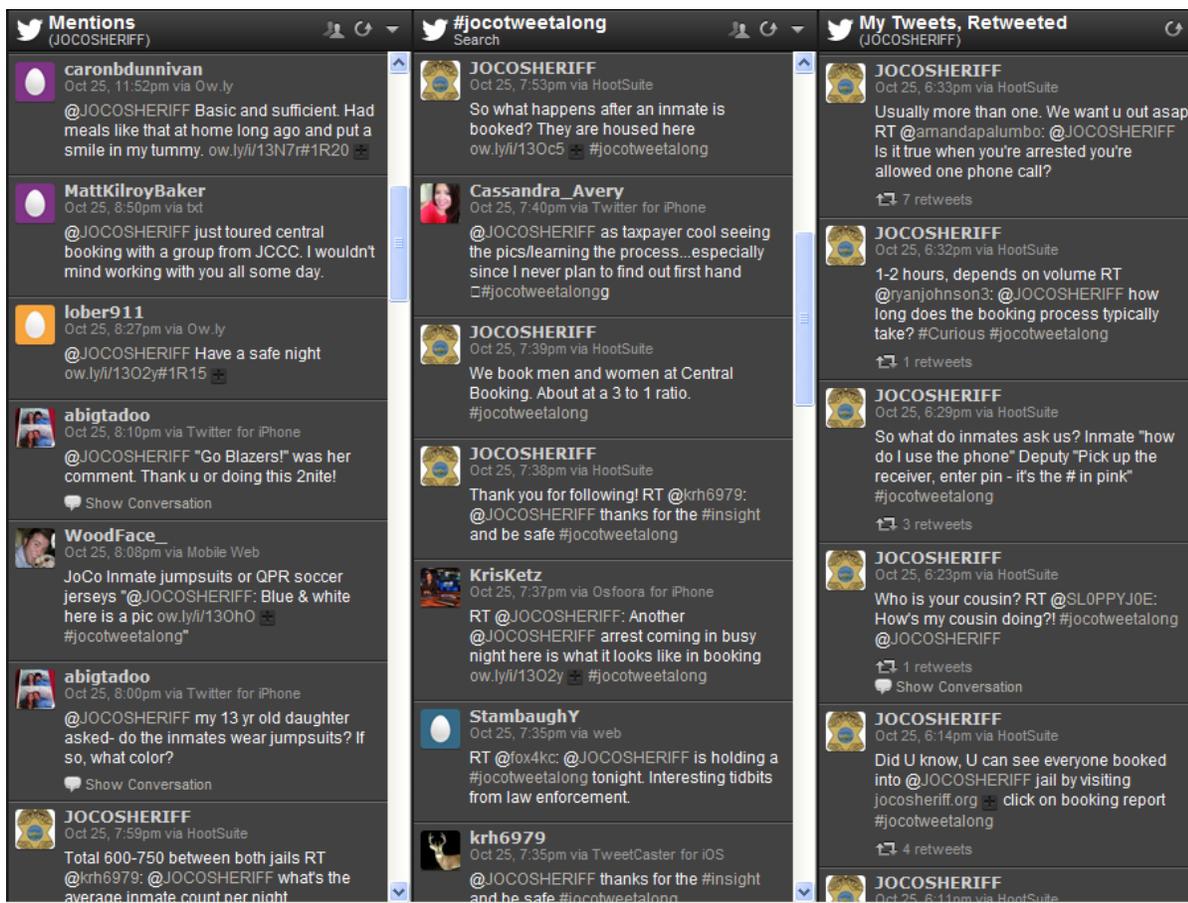
We started the event with a simple tweet from our Twitter account, @jocosherriff:

Thanks for following the #jocotweetalong – Roll-call, start of every shift, listening to what happened today, what we need to do tonight.

The true grammar enthusiast will notice a tweet doesn’t always conform to the standard way we write reports. For that matter, for you PIO types, AP style is out the window.

We then simply chronicled, using tweets, the events of the evening at the jail. We tweeted on the bookings that were coming in, what was for dinner, what questions inmates were asking, etc. We also answered questions that came in throughout the event from our Twitter audience and even did a couple of media interviews about the event. During a tweet-along, the person or persons conducting the event must pay close attention and, as always, have a coordinated message. Figure 2 shows a view of the live tweet-along activity as seen in TweetDeck.

Figure 2. A view of live tweet-along interaction



More examples of the audience interaction during the tweet-along appear at the end of this article.

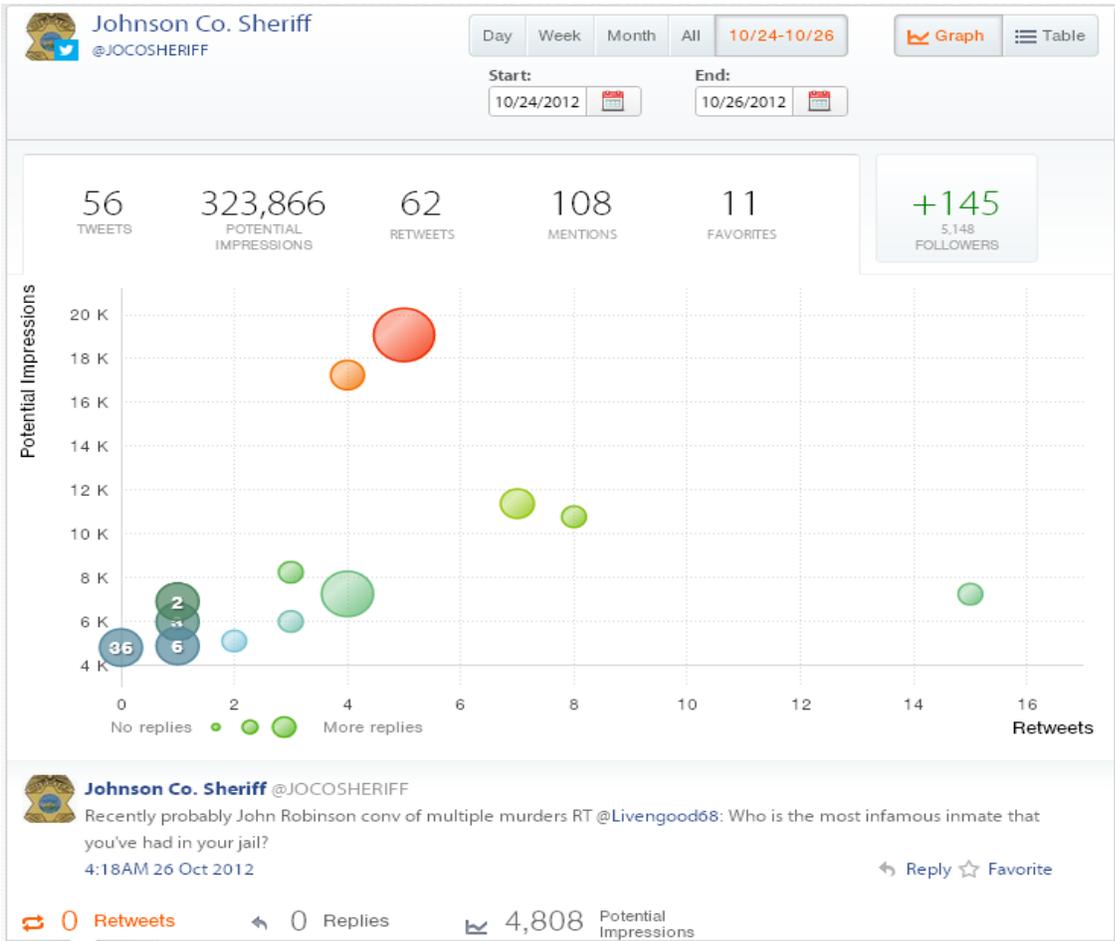
Results

At the conclusion of our event, we reviewed our results and compiled the following measurements of interaction with our audience.

Impressions (page views/message views)	296,503
New Twitter followers added	178
Tweets we sent using the #jocotweetalong hashtag	39
Retweeted messages (tweets shared by audience members)	44
Replies (messages to @jocosheriff from audience members)	26

Figure 3 shows an analysis of the tweet-along interactions across 3 days that was created using the CrowdBooster tool.

Figure 3. CrowdBooster analysis of interactions during tweet-along



Things to consider for a successful tweet-along:

1. Have a Public Information Officer or other trained person conduct the event.
2. Use a smart phone with a camera and a computer to make posts and interact with the audience.
3. Reserve 3 to 4 hours of staff time for the live event.

More tips for success:

1. Promote the event for at least 2 days prior to the event.
2. Involve local media outlets prior to and during the event.
3. Start and stop the event on schedule as you promised.
4. Have your sense of humor handy (that is, appropriate humor).
5. Be prepared for any possible questions and answer them the best way you can.
6. Capture your tweet results using third-party software.

More Views of the Tweet-Along

A Johnson County Citizen Academy participant wrote a blog post and captured the live tweet stream at <http://citizensacademy.blogspot.com/2012/10/recap-from-johnson-county-sheriffs.html>

The following screen grabs offer a sample of other views of the activity. In Column 1, “Mentions” are posts from audience members who referred to @jocosheriff. The search results in Column 2 show messages that included the #jocotweetalong hashtag.

Mentions
(JOCOSHERIFF)

horizonlimos
Oct 25, 4:27pm via TweetDeck
RT @amandapalumbo: Follow @JOCOSHERIFF for their first ever tweet along! Should be interesting stuff!! #jocotweetalong

amandapalumbo
Oct 25, 4:27pm via TweetDeck
Follow @JOCOSHERIFF for their first ever tweet along! Should be interesting stuff!! #jocotweetalong

PalumboKCTV5
Oct 25, 4:27pm via TweetDeck
Follow @JOCOSHERIFF for their first ever tweet along! Should be interesting stuff!! #jocotweetalong

gurutech4u
Oct 25, 4:26pm via Web
@kccheckpoint @JOCOSHERIFF whos tweeting? Cops or "alleged" suspects? LMAO. Cant wait and hope their honest!
Show Conversation

mitchweber
Oct 25, 4:24pm via HootSuite
RT @KCCheckpointKS: RT @JOCOSHERIFF: We will be doing a first ever Tweet-along from inside the @JOCOSHERIFF Central Booking jail Thurs...

KCCheckpointKS
Oct 25, 4:21pm via HootSuite
RT @JOCOSHERIFF: We will be doing a first ever Tweet-along from inside the @JOCOSHERIFF Central Booking jail Thurs Oct 25, 4pm - 7pm

#jocotweetalong
Search

jocoksgovt
Oct 25, 2:36pm via TweetDeck
Don't forget! @JOCOSHERIFF will be hosting a tweet-along from inside the Central Booking Facilities starting at 4pm today! #jocotweetalong

Iambadweather
Oct 25, 1:27pm via Twitter for iPhone
RT @JOCOSHERIFF: Tweet-Tweet - Follow our #tweet-along this afternoon from Central Booking. Join us from 4-7pm at #jocotweetalong. Roll-call starts at 4pm

kcwinks1
Oct 25, 1:22pm via Twitter for Android
RT @JOCOSHERIFF: Tweet-Tweet - Follow our #tweet-along this afternoon from Central Booking. Join us from 4-7pm at #jocotweetalong. Roll-call starts at 4pm

JOCOSHERIFF
Oct 25, 12:19pm via HootSuite
Tweet-Tweet - Follow our #tweet-along this afternoon from Central Booking. Join us from 4-7pm at #jocotweetalong. Roll-call starts at 4pm

dannyboi965
Oct 23, 12:07pm via Tweetbot for iOS
Copycat RT @JOCOSHERIFF: We will be doing a first ever Tweet-along from inside the @JOCOSHERIFF Central Booking Thurs Oct 25 #jocotweetalong

Fearnas_flute
Oct 23, 12:00pm via TweetCaster for Android
MT @JOCOSHERIFF will be doing a 1st ever Tweet-along from inside @JOCOSHERIFF Central Booking Thurs Oct 25, 4pm - 7pm follow #jocotweetalong

Mentions (JOCOSHERIFF)

- 

JOCOSHERIFF
Oct 25, 6:14pm via HootSuite
Did U know, U can see everyone booked into @JOCOSHERIFF jail by visiting jocosheriff.org click on booking report #jocotweetalong
4 retweets
- 

JOCOSHERIFF
Oct 25, 6:11pm via HootSuite
Thx for the shout out! RT @ABBIESKCTV5: @JOCOSHERIFF holding a tweet-along. See an update on the social networking event ahead on KCTV5...
1 retweets
- 

AmeritasProtect
Oct 25, 6:09pm via Twitter for Android
@JOCOSHERIFF probably joco citizen of the year..
Show Conversation
- 

jgolden72
Oct 25, 6:08pm via Twitter for iPhone
@JOCOSHERIFF waiting for the 2+ that just got arrested outside oak park mall?? Lots of oppd activity.
Show Conversation
- 

ABBIESKCTV5
Oct 25, 6:07pm via Web
@JOCOSHERIFF is holding a tweet-along. See an update on the social networking event ahead on KCTV5 news at 5. #jocotweetalong
2 retweets
- 

zerwekh
Oct 25, 6:05pm via Web
This alone should make most people law-abiding. RT @JOCOSHERIFF Yum, yum, here is whats for dinner at Central Booking

#jocotweetalong

- 

kccheckpoint
Oct 25, 5:27pm via HootSuite
@JOCOSHERIFF How much does it cost per day to house the average inmate at that facility? #jocotweetalong
- 

kccheckpoint
Oct 25, 5:26pm via HootSuite
@JOCOSHERIFF What's the breakdown of Local/State/Federal/MCE inmates at that facility? #jocotweetalong
- 

JOCOSHERIFF
Oct 25, 5:21pm via HootSuite
RT @katnyp2011: It depends on who u ask! How do officers like the location of the booking facility versus New Century? #jocotweetalong
- 

JOCOSHERIFF
Oct 25, 5:20pm via HootSuite
Headcount cleared finally so now its down to business, total 216 in custody at Central Booking #jocotweetalong
- 

katnyp2011
Oct 25, 5:15pm via web
@JOCOSHERIFF How do officers like the location of the booking facility versus New Century? #jocotweetalong
- 

newsanchormark
Oct 25, 5:14pm via Echofon
RT @mitchweber: "@JOCOSHERIFF: #jocotweetalong So, what does it look like when u first get to jail? ow.ly/i/13MAI steele, concrete, bars and doors"
- 

mitchweber
Oct 25, 5:13pm via Twitter for iPhone
"@JOCOSHERIFF: #jocotweetalong So, what does it look like when u first get to jail?"

Document available at:

http://community.nicic.gov/blogs/national_jail_exchange/archive/2013/01/09/the-art-of-the-tweet-along.aspx

The National Jail Exchange is an ongoing electronic journal focusing on providing information to jails practitioners and is sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). The contents of the articles, the points of view expressed by the authors, and comments posted in reaction to the articles do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the National Institute of Corrections.

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