

ICBA 2015 Social Media Leaders
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Lars Bredahl leads exponential social media success at North Carolina bank

By Ed Avis

Lars Bredahl is the consummate social media manager. The 28-year-old uses Twitter to keep up with industry trends, interacts with family and friends through Facebook, and manages a LinkedIn profile for professional use. And as digital channel product manager for First Bank in Apex, N.C., he immerses himself in how the digital world can be best put to use for banking.

"The digital space is really where my passion lies," says Bredahl, who earned a master's degree in interactive media from Elon University in 2011. "Social media was becoming a hot topic as I was progressing through my education, so it was a space I gravitated toward. I found it very exciting and a great space to really innovate in in the communications world."

For the third year, ICBA is recognizing Bredahl as one of 25 community bankers leading the industry as an individual social media influencer. He joined First Bank, a \$3.2 billion-asset community bank with 87 branches, in 2013. In the two years he has worked there, he and his colleagues in the marketing department have brought the bank's Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts from near dormancy to being vital parts of the bank's marketing mix.

One key to succeeding was meshing

First Bank's social media efforts with its content marketing strategy, Bredahl says. By using social media to amplify the valuable financial educational content the bank was creating, he helped support the bank's image as a financial partner with customers, rather than just a day-to-day transactional institution.

Another key to First Bank's social media success, Bredahl says, has been an awareness that each platform has its own characteristics. That means that posts to one platform are not automatically posted to other platforms. "We like to carefully craft each post to fit the platform, because each platform has a different audience," he says.

These days Bredahl is seen as a social media advisor to other departments at the bank, and recently he launched a social media task force comprised of 15 employees from various departments who are active in social media, including his colleague and manager, Audrey Sanders, whom he says has been a significant help. He helps the task force members with any social media challenges they face and encourages them to be "ambassadors" for the bank by commenting on, liking and re-posting content from the

bank's social media platforms.

"We've been seeing on average 300 new interactions per month, just from this team," he says, adding that this especially helps in the emerging "pay for play" environment, wherein Facebook asks commercial enterprises to pay to have their posts boosted.

As new social media platforms emerge, Bredahl tries them out to see which are likely to catch on in banking. "There are so many new ideas in this space," he notes. "Some take off and some don't, but it's important to never stop experimenting." □

Ed Avis is a writer in Illinois.

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—LARS BREDAHL

