

IS THREADS THE TWITTER KILLER?



A Guide for Nonprofits Thinking of Leaving the Nest



Threads, Meta's new text-based social media platform, has us all wondering: will this be the tool that puts Twitter (now X) out of business? The answer, in our opinion, is no. While its initial success made it seem like a promising contender, interest and engagement has since waned.

That being said, if Twitter dies on its own, Threads is likely best-positioned to function as its replacement, especially if Meta follows through on integrating with the Fediverse, which would allow users without Threads accounts to engage with content on Threads through other apps.

So, is it worth incorporating Threads into your communication strategy? Below is guidance to help your organization decide if Threads is a good fit.

What is Threads?

Threads is a new social media app built by Instagram. It features text-based posts up to 500 characters in length, which can include photos, videos, and links. It launched July 5, 2023, and is widely understood to be an [alternative to Twitter](#).

The app shares login and username information with Instagram, so users must have an Instagram account in order to create a Threads profile. Because the two platforms are connected, it's quick and easy to toggle between either profile and to cross-promote content.

What does a Threads account look like?

Feed

Similar to other social media platforms, a Threads feed curates posts from accounts you choose to follow, as well as accounts recommended for you. You can toggle between the two separate categories by choosing "Following" or "For You." The content on your feed is populated based on an algorithm rather than chronologically.

Engagement

You can interact with the posts on your feed by clicking one of four buttons positioned below the content of the post:

- Like
- Comment
- Repost, with the option to add your own caption
- Share, with the option to copy a link or an embed code



You can also visit other Threads users' profiles to engage with their content, which is organized into three categories: Threads, Replies, and Reposts. From a user's profile, you can click the Instagram icon to view their Instagram account, mute their content, block the account, or report it.

Posts (Threads)

A Threads post can contain text (not including hashtags), photos, videos, GIFs, voice recordings, polls, and links. Currently, you can only post text and photos from the web, while you can post all other forms of content from the app.



Tagging another account works the same way on Threads as it does Instagram. Before publishing a post, there's an option to choose who can reply – anyone, profiles your organization follows, or only profiles that are mentioned in the post.

Features continue to be added and updated on a regular basis, and are often announced through [Mark Zuckerberg's Threads profile](#), as shown above. At the time of this writing, search functionality is next on the docket.

Who's using Threads?

There are estimated to be well over 100 million Threads accounts, but worldwide, only 10.3 million show active daily use, as reported by [SimilarWeb](#) in August 2023. In the U.S., the estimate is even lower, at 576,000.

Nonprofit Usage

We've noticed that some nonprofits and foundations have begun using Threads regularly, while others tested Threads when it launched but have discontinued posting. Some have created profiles, but haven't yet shared any content.

Organizations we've partnered with that use Threads regularly include early childhood advocacy organization Zero To Three ([@ZEROTOTHREE](#)), Ocean Conservancy ([@oceanconservancy](#)), and Monterey Bay Aquarium ([@montereybayaquarium](#)), along with its sustainability initiative Seafood Watch ([@seafoodwatch](#)). Each of these organizations has a robust staff and larger capacity for communications.

Major Organizations and Foundations

Well-known organizations across issue areas with national or international reach have adopted Threads at different levels of engagement.

- The most active organizations – posting daily or multiple times a week – include Human Rights Campaign ([@humanrightscampaign](#)), American Civil Liberties Union ([@aclu_nationwide](#)), Habitat for Humanity ([@habitatforhumanity](#)), United Way ([@unitedway](#)), and PETA ([@peta](#)).
- Organizations with some activity – posting at least weekly – include World Wildlife Fund ([@wwf](#)), Mayo Clinic ([@mayoclinic](#)), and UNICEF ([@unicef](#)).
- Some of the least active organizations – posting sporadically or not at all – include Oceana ([@oceana](#)), Planned Parenthood ([@plannedparenthood](#)), Southern Poverty Law Center ([@splcenter](#)), and YMCA ([@ymca](#)).

Generally, major foundations aren't yet using Threads on a regular basis.

Journalist Usage

Two major Twitter user groups are journalists and politicians, and it appears neither has migrated to solely using Threads. The [head of Instagram](#) said the platform was “not going to do anything to encourage” politics and hard news on Threads, which may influence those users’ engagement.

In this [Columbia Journalism Review Q&A](#), one reporter offers his perspective on Threads versus Twitter:

“I am still on Twitter, and it is still useful to some extent, although it's getting harder and harder to find the gold amid the increasing amount of dross. And in just a few days on Threads, I would say I have probably reconstituted about 80 percent of my Twitter follows, which surprised me... Threads is at least holding out the promise that it will eventually federate with open-source apps like Mastodon, and I think that that is fundamentally a good thing that Twitter seems to have no intention of doing (and I've said publicly that if Threads doesn't do this then I will leave).”

Major U.S. print and broadcast news outlets like the New York Times, Washington Post, NPR, and CNN are posting to Threads regularly. But when it comes to local outlets, trade publications, or individual reporters, you'll need to do some research based on your issue area. Questions to consider include:

- Does your organization earn national, regional, or local media coverage?
- Which beat – climate, immigration, health, economics, for example – does your work fall into?
- Are you more likely to get covered in a trade outlet or a mainstream media outlet?

Your answers to these questions will determine which reporters you'd want to see on Threads before making the jump.

What are some important things to keep in mind?

While Threads shares some features with existing platforms, understanding how the platform functions is an important first step to determining if it's a fit for your organization. Here's a few key ones to be aware of.

- **Posts appear in the feed based on an algorithm - not chronologically.** Much like Facebook and Instagram, posts appear in the feed based on an algorithm rather than as they're posted. For some, this may be a benefit because your most engaged followers are likely to see your content. However, for those who use social media to track and engage in discussions and media trends, this could make it hard to engage effectively.
- **Your ability to make changes to your posts is limited.** After publishing a post, you have 5 minutes to make edits. If you need to make changes past the five-minute mark, your only option is to delete the post and repost it. Some organizations may not see this as a concern as most platforms show previous versions of posts, but others may be cautious about the permanence of posts.
- **There are currently no analytics available.** Threads does not currently offer analytics to show reach of posts. While it seems likely that either an integrated analytics feature will be added, or an independent one could be created that can be used as an add-on, for the moment you're only able to gauge your reach using the imbedded like and replies for each post. Organizations that rely heavily on analytics to gauge impact, guide strategy, or report on reach to stakeholders may find this inadequate.
- **Threads has strict Community Guidelines.** Threads shares Instagram's [Community Guidelines](#) for posting and interacting on the app, which are focused on ensuring a safe and supportive community for users. Instagram's [announcement](#) noted: "Since 2016 we've invested more than \$16 billion in building up the teams and technologies needed to protect our users, and we remain focused on advancing our industry-leading integrity efforts and investments to protect our community."
- **Threads is planning for future integration that would broaden the reach of posts.** Threads is in talks with ActivityPub to integrate the systems, meaning that your Threads posts would be accessible from other apps if your profile is public. Instagram's [announcement](#) noted: "Our vision is that people using compatible apps will be able to follow and interact with people on Threads without having a Threads account, and vice versa, ushering in a new era of diverse and interconnected networks." This allows Threads users to reach new audiences with no added effort.

Is Threads right for your organization?

While Threads hasn't yet proven itself as Twitter's arch nemesis, there are a few signs to look out for that would indicate a potential shift in social power:

- If users migrate to Threads and begin using it more frequently than they do Twitter.
- If Threads ditches the algorithmic feed and serves content chronologically.
- If Meta integrates Threads with the Fediverse, as planned.

Of course, there's always a chance Twitter could implode, making Threads the closest alternative platform to fill the void, regardless of the users and features it currently lacks.

Is your organization considering joining Threads? There are a few considerations you should take into account before deciding to make the jump:

- **Capacity.** Like all other social channels, being active on Threads will require capacity to post and engage regularly. Questions to consider include:
 - Does your staff currently have capacity to manage another social media platform, or would you deprioritize another platform to create time to be active on Threads?
 - Does your staff have the time and appetite to learn a new platform, and are they willing to invest time in learning and experimenting about how to make your content effective?
- **Audiences.** The goal of any communication channel is to be able to connect with your priority audiences. Questions to consider include:
 - Are your key audiences using Threads? If so, are they following you?
 - Are the messengers you need to help carry out your message using Threads?
 - Do you have any gaps in your current audience outreach that you need to address? If so, is that audience group using Threads?
- **Features.** Each social media channel offers different features and benefits, so it's important to prioritize the ones that are conducive to your communication strategy. Questions to consider include:
 - Can you deliver the messages you need in 500 characters?
 - Does the lack of hashtags hinder your reach?
 - Does it matter that there currently aren't analytics?

Think about these questions and discuss them with your staff to help gauge whether joining Threads would benefit your work. A [PR Daily](#) article suggested:

Will this be the app that kills Twitter once and for all? It's far too early to say. But it appears to have the best chance of any app that's tried so far.... Explore it, consider its utility, but remember to never put all your eggs in one basket.

If you do decide to start using Threads, there's a few key needs to make sure your organization does so effectively.

- **Track updates and new features.** Updates and new features are being added rapidly since the channel's launch. Follow these updates to make sure you're using best practices and not missing out on useful additions. Watch [Mark Zuckerberg's Threads profile](#) for updates, and digital media outlets like Mashable, TechCrunch, and PR Daily, along with major media outlets who report on new features.
- **Have a content plan.** Like any communication channel, make sure you have a clear plan on your goals for this channel. Get clear on what kind of content you're posting, what your schedule will be, who you're looking to engage, and how you'll track outcomes. Revisit your plan regularly as you learn more about what is effective and as new features are added.
- **Be experimental.** Because the platform is new and evolving, there aren't best practices and tips to rely on yet. This gives you flexibility to be creative in your posting and see what works well. Try different approaches and track what is effective for your content.

Are you using Threads? Share your thoughts with us!

As Threads continues to evolve, we'll make updates to this guide, but for now, we don't think it's poised to become the Twitter killer some hoped it would be. We could be persuaded otherwise if audiences begin to migrate in droves, or if Threads reverts to a chronological versus algorithmic feed, or if the platform integrates with the Fediverse as planned.

In the meantime, we'd love to hear what you think about Twitter being on the outs. Has your organization developed a strategy for Threads? Are there other alternatives nonprofits and foundations should consider? Contact us at hello@springboard.partners with your thoughts!