



1h ago

The Keizer Police Department has Tagged You in a Post

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"I'm trying to be accountable for something horrible that happened but then having it like completely blown up and exacerbated by the public and the shaming and the hate mail. I don't think I left my house for like a week after that," Batsell said. "Keizer is a very, very small town and I've lived here for a really long time and I was just mortified to even go in public."

"I just thought, how is it fair that somebody's worst moment, everyone's allowed to have this entire conversation about it. Like this completely public stream where anyone can say anything."

Law enforcement use of social media

Social media gives police departments the power to share information directly with the public. In some cases, like emergencies, the ability to share up-to-date information with the public can increase the safety of the community.

It also gives police departments, which often have thousands of followers, the power to share information on cases that they are directly involved in. They often post the information before it appears on media outlets, allowing them to shape the narrative of what occurred.

The Keizer Police Department posts multiple times per week on its Facebook page, with close to 12,000 followers. Most often, these posts promote community events — such as Coffee with a Cop — or provide important community information, such as road closures or alerting the community to scam calls.

Scattered between the lighthearted photos, however, are photos of crime scenes, suspects and mugshots. These posts often include a combination of an arrestee's name,

hometown, age, arrest charges and, in the past, booking photos. The crimes posted range from felonies, such as attempted murder, to misdemeanors, like DUIs. They usually occur when the person is already in custody and prior to a resolution in court.

"We're just putting the information out there that's public information. That's all it is and we're just using that media platform to do so, or flash alerts to send out press releases," said Wenning. "We're not looking to create controversy or issues between our citizens."

Public shaming

The Salem Police Department's Facebook page includes links to press releases but rarely, if ever, do the Facebook posts include the name of the arrested person. Since the beginning of 2020, they haven't posted a single booking photo either.

On their posts that include links to press releases, the Salem Police Department often includes a disclaimer that refers users to a link that outlines the city of Salem's social media policy.

The city's policy says that it monitors comments and reserves the right "to remove posted comments that are inconsistent with the Comment Policy."

Since the start of 2020, the Keizer Police Department has posted a total of 17 arrest incidents on Facebook where they identified the arrestee's name. In 13 of those posts, a booking photo was also included on the post. Wenning said the department does not monitor the comments on these posts.

In June of 2020, after a 19-year-old was arrested for drunk driving and eluding Keizer police, the department posted a booking photo of the teen along with his name, age

and hometown.

Similar to Batsell, the insults began to pile up on the post.

"Get these people in jails and prisons and keep them there!" one person commented.

"Keep him in jail! He has proved to be a public menace, and eluding the police makes him look even worse!" another Facebook user said.

As over 150 comments racked up, and the post was shared 231 times, the teen took to the comments to defend himself against the attacks.

"Definitely a lesson learned. I definitely made the mistake of not calling for a ride, but I let the anger of the situation take control and led me to leave (and) drive impaired," the teen said in a response to one comment.

"This isn't luck, this is God giving me a second chance to possibly make a change and not repeat the same mistake nor allow someone close to me to make the same grave mistake," he wrote in another.

Jason Thompson, a criminal defense lawyer in Salem, said that he believes posting this information directly to Facebook, and including booking photos, is a way of public shaming.

"A lot of clients I'll have will complain, 'Hey, they just ran a story and smeared me in the paper and said that I was arrested for, you know, X, Y, or Z.' And I'm like, well, that's true. You were arrested for X," said Thompson. "That doesn't mean you're guilty, but there's nothing, there's nothing false in the story. Now, when the police end up using the mugshots, it's like a public shaming thing."

"What's the point of a police department becoming a newspaper? I mean what's that all about?" Thompson added.

As of Jan. 1, police departments are no longer allowed to release booking photos except in certain circumstances where it could help a case.

Janelle Bynum, Clackamas state representative and a chief sponsor of the bill that prohibits booking photos, said that she felt

the release of these booking photos often led to doxing — a term for online harassment through the release of personal information.

"We concluded that, as an Oregon value, that wasn't where the state wanted to be in terms of putting people who had only been accused of a crime, one of their worst days, and putting their pictures out in perpetuity," Bynum said in an interview. "Which could also have an impact on people's personal safety and could have an impact on their job prospects."

Even without booking photos, the online harassment that Bynum describes still exists. In Batsell's case, where a booking photo wasn't provided, it only took a short amount of time for commenters to identify that she was a local business owner and post about her arrest history.

A Sept. 22, 2021 Facebook post from the Keizer Police Department said that a 20-year-old male had been arrested the day before for driving under the influence of intoxicants, among other charges, after crashing into a power pole and rolling his car into a yard. The post included the man's name but not his booking photo.

Over 160 comments piled up below the post as commenters debated if the man was sober or not. One commenter posted a video in the comment section of the man being arrested, subsequently revealing the man's face.

Controlling the narrative

Wenning and Keizer Police Chief John Teague say the information in these posts is already public and is often the same information sent to media outlets.

"We arrest people and make other police actions all the time. If they're newsworthy, then we'll post them to the media and they end up getting posted to Facebook too, incidentally," Teague said.


While press releases are sent to media outlets in conjunction with the Facebook posts a majority of the time, this isn't always

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