

Analysis of X alternatives

Information for Capital Regional District Board

Capital Regional District | February 2025

Purpose

To evaluate the potential benefits and drawbacks of the Capital Regional District (CRD) adopting the Bluesky platform as a substitute for X (Twitter).

Background

Bluesky is an emerging social media platform established in 2019 as a project under the previous leadership of Twitter founder Jack Dorsey. It became a fully independent company in 2022, focusing on giving users more control. It does this through the AT Protocol, which was designed to enhance privacy, data security, and user control over digital identities by allowing seamless movement of social connections across different apps. Bluesky gained popularity after Elon Musk took over Twitter rebranding it as X. Bluesky is viewed as a potential replacement for X.

Corporate Communications and Engagement currently has placeholder accounts in three potential alternatives to X.

- Bluesky,
- Threads (owned by Meta)
- Mastodon.

Pros and Cons of the Bluesky platform

Pros:

Decentralization and Privacy:

- Bluesky's decentralized nature ensures that user data is not controlled by a single entity, enhancing privacy and data security.
- Users have greater control over their digital identities and can carry their social connections across different apps that adopt the AT Protocol.

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User Experience:

- The platform offers a user-friendly interface similar to the early days of Twitter, making it easy for users to transition.
- There is no central algorithm manipulating the feed, leading to a more genuine engagement and visibility based on user interactions.

Community and Engagement:

- Bluesky has a growing user base, with over 27 million users as of January 2025.
- The platform fosters a positive community with minimal trolling and negativity, creating a safer and more pleasant environment for users

Innovation and Growth:

- Bluesky is rapidly evolving, with new features being rolled out regularly, keeping the platform fresh and engaging.
- The platform's user base expanded from 10 million in September 2024 to 27.44 million by mid-January 2025, demonstrating a growth rate of approximately 1 user every 6 seconds.

Cons:

Discoverability Issues:

- Finding specific users can be challenging due to limited verification and naming conventions, which may hinder user engagement and connectivity.

Limited Integration:

- Unlike other decentralized platforms like Mastodon, Bluesky does not currently connect with ActivityPub, limiting its interoperability with other networks
- Currently, there is no integration with Hootsuite, the social media platform the CRD leverages to publish and moderate social media content. So that means anytime a communicator would want to

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publish to Bluesky that would have to go into the app to publish as opposed to our current process where we have greater oversight in Hootsuite.

Early-Stage Development:

- As a relatively new platform, Bluesky may still have some technical and usability issues that need to be addressed
- The platform's ecosystem is still developing, which may result in a less polished experience compared to more established social media networks.
- Though the platform is growing quickly, a scan of Vancouver Island accounts shows promising but still limited adoption, confined to early adopters in the media (CFAX, individual reporters).

Potential Imposters:

- The current verification system is not robust, making it difficult to identify genuine accounts, which could lead to issues with imposters

Financial Uncertainty:

- Bluesky is a start-up company currently in Series B round of financing after a \$15 million series A round of financing, led by Bain Capital Ventures. News reports suggest a valuation of \$700 million. Reports also suggest it is developing a subscription-based revenue model.

Bluesky Comparisons

Bluesky vs. X (Twitter):

User Control: Bluesky offers more user control over data and content due to its decentralized model, whereas X is centralized and often criticized for algorithmic manipulation.

Community: Bluesky fosters a more positive community with less trolling, while X has issues with both spam and toxic interactions.

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Verification: X has a paid verification system, which has sparked debates, while Bluesky's verification system is still developing.

Bluesky vs. Mastodon:

Interoperability: Mastodon connects with ActivityPub, allowing interaction with other networks in the Fediverse, while Bluesky does not

User Experience: Both platforms offer a decentralized experience, but Bluesky is noted for its simpler, more user-friendly interface.

Bluesky vs. Threads:

Accessibility: Bluesky is open to everyone, while Threads requires an Instagram account, making it more exclusive to Meta users.

Community Building: Bluesky focuses on niche, interest-driven communities, whereas Threads is more integrated with Instagram's broader user base.

Integration: Threads has integration with Hootsuite so CRD communicators would be able to publish to the channel similar to other CRD social channels.

Potential Risks of Adoption:

Content Moderation Challenges:

Bluesky's user-driven content moderation may not be sufficient to protect against inappropriate or harmful material. The platform's decentralized nature complicates adherence to community guidelines, potentially leading to delayed responses to harmful content.

Security Concerns:

As a relatively new platform, Bluesky's privacy measures are still evolving, raising concerns about data security as it scales.

The platform is actively working on systems to identify and mitigate spam and fake accounts, but these measures are still in development

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Financial Viability

Bluesky is startup so its long-term viability remains an open question. Success social media startups are mixed at best and the CRD needs to be mindful before investing in the platform.

Cultural and Social Risks:

Bluesky has faced controversies, such as user backlash against certain public figures, which could impact the platform's reputation and user experience.

The platform's rapid growth has led to challenges in managing government censorship, scam accounts, and propaganda

Technical and Usability Issues:

Being in the early stages of development, Bluesky may still have technical and usability issues that need to be addressed

The platform's ecosystem is still developing, which may result in a less polished experience compared to more established social media networks.

Conclusion:

Bluesky's focus on decentralization, privacy, and user experience aligns well with modern digital engagement strategies. However, the current limitations in discoverability, integration, and verification, along with potential risks in content moderation, security, technical issues and financial viability concerns, need to be carefully considered before a full-scale adoption.

Recommendation:

1. Point X users to our other social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) and our new subscription features on our website.
2. Continue to monitor Bluesky adoption in the South Island before fully activating the account.