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## Social Media at Dodis: Small Team, Big Impact

January 23, 2013 by Julia Kuhn Mirza | [Leave a comment](#)

It is time for another spotlight on some of Switzerland's social media champions in universities and research. This time I had the pleasure of taking a closer look at [Dodis](#), a research project that maintains a database of Swiss diplomatic documents and publishes books with a relevant selection of these documents. Researchers Christiane Sibille and Ursina Bentele, as well as Dodis director Sacha Zala, kindly answered all my questions about their social media presence.

Those who visit the [Dodis Facebook page](#) for the first time might wonder why they have an abundance of pictures showing a black bag with a Dodis logo in front of different backgrounds. At least that's what I was wondering when I browsed through their timeline a while back.

Dodis, short for "Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland," is a research project consisting of historians from different Swiss universities. The project aims to select, digitize, and publish key documents on Swiss foreign relations. Nine researchers are involved in this project, all of whom are specialists in relations between Switzerland and other countries, international organizations, or individual policy areas.

With all that brainpower it is not surprising that the pictures of the Dodis bags are more than just pictures promoting the brand. At second glance, I started to realize that the location in each picture seemed to be the focus of the post. The location is not revealed in the post, but a link in the post does reveal it. The link takes the visitor to a document stored in the extensive online database managed by the research group. That document is related to the location and solves the mystery.

A picture of the [Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles](#) for example links to documents related to the largest city in California. Architecture and California enthusiasts will recognize the building and hence the location immediately, but others need to click on the accompanying link to find out.



From left to right: Christiane Sibille, Sacha Zala, and Ursina Bentele from Dodis



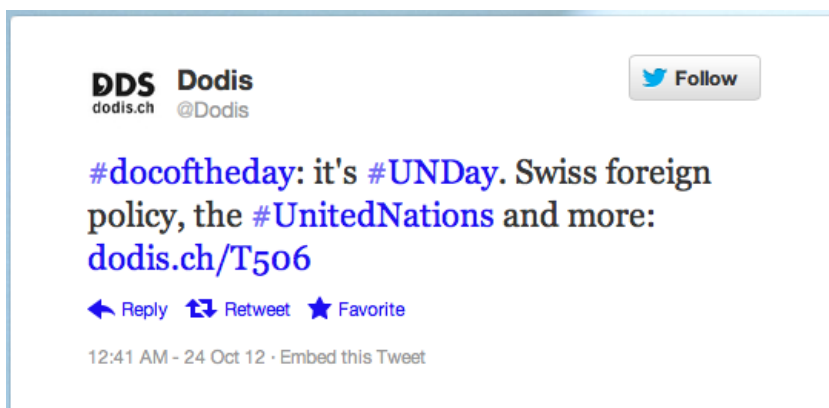
Post on the Dodis Facebook page with a link that takes the visitor to the extensive database of documents.

This social media campaign cleverly promotes the database and triggers quite some engagement among the community around the Dodis Facebook page. Some of the pictures are taken by Dodis staff, others are sent to them by the community. When submitted by outsiders, the team looks for the corresponding document and links it in the post.

Images spark curiosity and are a light way to learn or discover something new, in this case something held within the database. Fans happily take pictures of the bag when on vacation visiting another country and the social media team diligently posts the pictures, even if there is no document available for that site.

### A Clear Path Without a Strategy

Apart from the Facebook page, Dodis uses [Twitter](#) extensively, mainly to promote their database with a dedicated hashtag ([#docoftheday](#)) that is accompanied by a link to a document. The document is either from that same date in years past, or it is about a current event, like the Olympic Games last summer. Asked about a written social media strategy, Sacha Zala answers: "It's like the British constitution, there is one, but it is not written down."



A Dodis tweet with the hashtag [#docoftheday](#) and a link to the document in their database. In this case Dodis chose a document about the UN, since the day of this tweet (October 24) marks the Day of the United Nations.

Dodis director Sacha Zala is part of the social media core team, along with his colleagues Christiane Sibille and Ursina Bentele, who all dedicate

some of their time to Facebook and Twitter whenever their busy schedules allow it. Many ideas for their social media channels are discussed with the entire Dodis team, which consists of nine researchers and five student assistants. They all chime in when an event or a publication comes up and needs to be promoted on social media.

The team has one goal in mind when it comes to their social media efforts: Bring users to the database. Using Twitter and Facebook to achieve that, Dodis is aware that one size doesn't fit all and knows very well that the audience is different for each channel. "We use Twitter mainly for the promotion of our database. Facebook is our platform for more fun activities, such as the pictures of the Dodis bag."

## On to New Grounds

The energetic research team manages to tweet and post quite regularly and isn't slowing down. They have recently expanded their digital arsenal with their own [iPhone app](#), another tool to drive traffic to their online database.

I am quite impressed with the enthusiasm in this small research team and the smart way they bring seemingly formal documents to life and to the attention of the public. I am sure that this is not the last creation in the Dodis house and I am looking forward to seeing many other creative and innovative ways of promoting these documents. But in the meantime, I will go out with my own little Dodis bag and take a picture in front of a San Francisco landmark. Stay tuned!

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