

Guide: Social Media Metrics in Government

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Why Social Media Metrics Matter to Your Agency

In a digital strategy, nearly anything can be measured, compiled and analyzed. However, collecting data for its own sake is pointless. What matters is how well your agency can use digital measurement to improve its services, both online and offline, and your social media metrics are no exception. Effective metrics will not only fuel your social media strategy, but drive decisions that impact your agency's core operations.

The New GSA Guidelines for Social Media Measurement

This year, the United States General Services Administration [released new guidelines](#) for how to measure federal agencies' social media engagement. These guidelines are intended to help you adopt the most cost-effective tools and standards currently in use in the public and private sectors, with an emphasis on tying social media activities to your agency's mission. If you're working at the state or municipal level, you'll discover that these federal guidelines are still highly applicable to your needs.

The social media metrics align with the five categories of web performance measurement that are outlined in [HowTo.gov's broader digital metrics guidance](#): Breadth, Depth, Direct Engagement, Loyalty, and Customer Experience.

Breadth	Breadth metrics illustrate the size and growth of your social media community.
Depth	Depth metrics indicate the duration and user actions involved in a website visit as a result of your social media strategy.
Direct Engagement	Direct engagement metrics track response times and the volume and frequency of engagements with the public.
Loyalty	Loyalty metrics indicate how many community members are returning to websites through which social media channels.
Customer Experience	Customer Experience metrics are gleaned from sentiment analysis of what is being said on social media about your agency's programs and other topics.

In addition to the five core metrics categories, the GSA's social media guidelines also contain two goal-oriented metrics: Campaigns and Strategic Outcomes. These metrics are particularly important because they allow you to form a narrative of your social media strategy and its outcome on your agency's mission.

Campaigns	Campaign analysis is concerned with the overall performance of particular social media campaigns and tactics, based on the five categories of metrics listed above.
Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Outcome analysis evaluates how social media strategies directly impact the strategic priorities of your agency.

To review all of the baseline social media metrics in detail, visit [“Social Media Metrics for Federal Agencies” on HowTo.Gov.](#)

How to Use Social Media Metrics

Step 1: Align Social Media Goals with Agency Objectives

Before you can decide which metrics are important, you need to understand what you’re trying to achieve with social media. Each government agency has a unique mission and its own strategic needs for providing services to the public. Therefore, your social media measurement must link back to your agency’s stated goals in order to be meaningful and actionable.

According to Sheila Campbell, director of GSA’s Center for Excellence in Digital Government, the goal for some agencies may be broadening their outreach in a particular community, such as military families or scientists in a specific field, while other agencies may be focused on improving their response time for citizen questions.

Here are some examples of stated agency goals:

State Dept: Teach English via cell phones in developing countries

DoE: Collaboration and knowledge

FEMA: Provide real-time disaster information

USAF: Improve health service delivery

CDC: Monitor influenza nationwide

Nat’l Archives: Recruit expert volunteers

My agency’s goals for social media are:

Internal

- Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing
- Achieving Transparency
- Talent Acquisition
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

External

- Citizen Engagement
- Promote Services
- Provide Customer Service
- Provide Real-Time Resources
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Step 2: Define your Audience

Who are you trying to engage or support? Your agency's mandate or program objectives should help guide you in determining your audience, but you might choose to target your social media campaign at a group who is related to your core constituency. For example, if you're planning a social media strategy to educate smokers about the impacts of second-hand smoke, you might choose to engage the family members of cigarette smokers instead of smokers themselves. This might have demographic implications for your audience and therefore your social media channels, tactics and metrics.

Tip: Location is Everything

In addition to demographics, consider the geographic dimensions of your audience. If you're supporting a federal program with a nationwide mission, you may wish to segment your social media metrics by state or city in order to reveal geographic variations in program efficacy. Geographic definition of social media audiences is also vital for programs at the state and municipal levels, and for federal agencies that engage foreign audiences, such as USAID or the State Department.

I am attempting to engage with: _____ in order to _____.
(audience) (social media goal)

I am attempting to engage with: _____ in order to _____.
(audience) (social media goal)

Step 3: Select Your Social Media Channels

With so many social media channels available, it's important to pick those which are best suited to your community and the objectives you want to achieve. Identify the channels where your target audience is already participating, where they're talking about topics related to your agency's mission, and where they're reaching out to you.

Here's a quick summary four important social networks and how your agency can use them:

Facebook - The largest social network in the world, Facebook is also one of the best mediums for community discussion and engagement around your agency's work. If you're looking to promote your services or educate citizens about an issue, Facebook has excellent reach and virality. Use Facebook to share visually compelling photos and videos, and promote discussion by posing questions to your community members. Your agency or program can specialize its Facebook messaging for different audiences by limiting certain posts to specific demographic groups or geographic regions.

Twitter - If you want to offer social customer service or provide real-time resources, Twitter is practically indispensable. Your agency can monitor Twitter to discover citizens who are praising, complaining, or asking questions about your agency's services. You can then serve their needs within Twitter or direct them to other online resources. Numerous government agencies have also used Twitter to keep citizens informed during natural disasters, public health incidents, and even local events like roadwork and sewer maintenance. In addition, Twitter offers a wealth of social intelligence that your agency can use to optimize its services.

LinkedIn - A professional social networking site that is effective for advertising jobs or discussing job postings with applicants. Make sure to maintain an active presence on LinkedIn, even when your agency is not currently recruiting for any positions. An up-to-date LinkedIn page with quality content can greatly improve your agency's reputation as an employer among passive job searchers. Your agency can also attract highly skilled candidates by participating in LinkedIn Groups, which are some of the best communities of practice on the web.

Google+ - With a rapidly growing user base, Google+ is becoming hard for any organization to ignore. The ability to segment your community into various Circles will help your agency deliver its messaging to the most relevant audiences. Its position as the heart of Google's online services also makes it vital for search engine optimization; if you want to help citizens find accurate information about your agency, make sure to share your content on Google+ so that it's more likely to show up at the top of their Google Search results. Google Hangouts, another well-integrated Google feature, will allow your agency to deliver live, engaging video presentations to a large community. Furthermore, Google's decision to integrate Google+ into Youtube comments makes this social network even more important to your agency's video content strategy.

Tip: Take a Holistic Approach

There are numerous other social channels, including Youtube, Instagram, Vine, Pinterest and more, so there's no reason to limit your presence to the four major networks listed above. Regardless of which channels you use, take a holistic approach that capitalizes on the unique capabilities of each and weaves them into a coherent strategy.

Tip: Use a "Hub"

It's often best to select one channel as a "hub" for your social media strategy. Typically, this role is filled by a website or blog. The hub should act as a central repository for any downloadable resources, and is a good place to embed video content. You can drive traffic to your hub from Twitter, Facebook and other channels, but make sure those supporting channels are providing value to citizens in their own right. Your hub can also be used to promote activity on other channels, such as Google Hangouts or Q&A's on Twitter.

Establishing a website or blog as a hub is important from a measurement perspective. Your hub is where you will probably track "goal conversions" with a web analytics tool such as Google Analytics (see Step 4).

The Hub of my social media program is: _____.

The purpose of my Hub is: _____.

Social media channel 1: _____.

The purpose of this channel is to: _____.

This channel will support my hub by: _____.

My Hub will support this channel by: _____.

Social media channel 2: _____.

The purpose of this channel is to: _____.

This channel will support my hub by: _____.

My Hub will support this channel by: _____.

Social media channel 3: _____.

The purpose of this channel is to: _____.

This channel will support my hub by: _____.

My Hub will support this channel by: _____.

Step 4: Choose Your Metrics

Now that you have aligned your social media objectives with your agency’s mission, defined your audiences, and outlined how each social media channel fits into a coherent strategy, it’s time to prioritize your metrics.

Remember, you’ll need to base your analysis of Campaigns and Strategic Outcomes on data from the five core metrics categories. In addition, you should consider the web performance metrics that you want to track, and how they relate to your efforts on social media channels.

Here are some example social media metrics and web performance metrics from the five core categories. Refer to the GSA’s guidelines at [HowTo.Gov](https://www.gsa.gov/transaction/howto) for more detailed descriptions of the metrics and how to use them.

	Social Media Metrics	Web Performance Metrics
Breadth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Twitter Followers• Tumblr Subscribers• Facebook Fans & Total Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique visitors• Total visits• Page views
Depth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Click-throughs• Goal conversions attributable to social media• Youtube Views & Minutes Watched	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goal conversions• Pages per visit• Visit Duration• Time on Page• Bounce Rate
Direct Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions answered• Response time• Likes• Comments• Mentions• Shares	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On-site search queries
Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage of users who repeat-visit from a particular social media source	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New vs. returning visitors• Visits per visitor
Customer Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social media sentiment data• Top keywords and hashtags• Survey data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survey data

Tip: Establish Baselines and Start Small

A good rule of thumb for any organization is to start small with measurement and then become more sophisticated over time. First, measure your current activities (where applicable) to establish performance baselines. Set realistic, quantifiable improvements that you want to achieve over a limited time period. Then evaluate your results, form a hypothesis to explain what happened, and refine your social media tactics or measurement practices. Set new objectives and repeat the process. Stay nimble and keep improving.

Here are some examples of quantified social media objectives:

My objective is to increase **Questions Answered** on **Twitter** from 12/day to 20/day by the end of next month in order to **Provide Customer Service**.

My objective is to grow **Subscribers** on **Tumblr** from 1200 to 1500 by March 15th in order to **Achieve Transparency**.

My objective is to achieve 200 **Click Throughs** to my agency website from **Facebook** next week in order to **Provide Real-Time Resources**.

My objective is to _____

My objective is to _____

Step 4: Integrate Social Media with Web Analytics

In order to perform an effective Campaign or Strategic Outcome analysis, it's vital to integrate your social media program with a web analytics tool such as Google Analytics. Doing so will allow you to attribute website activity to your social media tactics. You will be able to see how many page visits your website receives from your social media channels, how long your social media community spends on your website before leaving, and how often their visits "convert" into content downloads, newsletter sign-ups, registrations and transactions.

As you become more sophisticated in your integration of social media and web measurement, you'll want to slice up your website visitors more granularly. After all, your social media community is not homogenous: they click through to your website from different social networks, from multiple social media accounts your agency might have on each of those networks, and from links in specific social messages. If you can measure the website impact of a single social media post, you'll have powerful data with which to optimize your tactics.

Tip: Add URL Parameters to Your Social Media Links

Custom URL parameters enable your web analytics tool to attribute incoming traffic to specific campaigns and social media accounts. Here's what a URL might look like when custom parameters are appended for Google Analytics:

http://myagency.gov/resourcepage.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=promoted-tweet&utm_campaign=citizen-engagement

In this example, Google Analytics knows that the referral source was a promoted tweet from Twitter, and that it was part of a campaign called "citizen engagement". Google Analytics would then be able to calculate the impact of this particular campaign, of your promoted tweets, and other segments.

To find out how HootSuite Enterprise can help you automatically append customer parameters to your social media links, consult our free guide, "[Using Google Analytics with HootSuite](#)".