



WHITE PAPER

Social Media in Government

5 Key Considerations

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Government agencies and public sector stakeholders are increasingly looking to leverage social media to improve the quality of government services and enable greater citizen engagement, elevate public services, reduce costs, and much more.

Publicly available social media sites and tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube are providing governments, agencies, and citizens with robust options for meeting these objectives. They provide a wide range of audio, video, and interactive capabilities without substantial costs.

Some high profile examples of government agencies engaging social media tools to great benefit have emerged over the past 3 – 5 years. Best practices are available and media coverage of candidates and campaigns engaging constituents and over-achieving fundraising goals abound.

A broad outline of public sector stakeholders includes the following:

- Central and devolved governments
- Elected councils
- Government agencies
- Elected officials and their organisations
- Voters, constituents, citizens

However, for the vast majority of government agencies across the U.K., these tools are still fairly new and relatively unexplored. Organisations are beginning to realise that implementing social media tools internally and externally requires potential changes in work processes and policies.

Deploying these tools also requires exploring new ways of working and the creation of new policies and guidelines to encourage proper use and to mitigate the risks that could lead to breach of privacy and security.

Clearly, developing a social media strategy is critical. Understanding what the organisation wishes to accomplish in general – and how social media will further that mission – is the starting point, followed immediately by the development of a comprehensive social media policy.

- Governments, like businesses, are realizing that it is essential to use the chosen communication tools that citizens and stakeholders themselves use. And the facts about social media are compelling:
- Facebook has over 1 billion members – 54% users access via mobile devices
- 200M + members on LinkedIn over 200 countries and territories
- Every minute, 72 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube
- GOV.UK has social media guidelines for civil servants (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-media-guidance-for-civil-servants>)
- Emergency management Twitter alerts have been implemented in the UK and Ireland (http://www.hemmingfire.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/1941/Twitter_Alerts_for_the_UK_and_Ireland.html)
- Social media analytics help local politicians glean their constituents' attitudes toward specific policies and decisions

Until recently, the communication within each stakeholder has occurred primarily in 'traditional' fashion –i.e. via direct mail, some email, print media, television, radio, press releases, etc. This communication is primarily one-way.

The rise of social media has opened new opportunities for communication in and among public sector stakeholders. It has also surfaced 5 key considerations.

1. Aligning Objectives

- Social media use should support the organisational mission and overall communication strategy. All levels of government and most agencies have a stated mission and vision. Social media efforts should be strategically aligned to support those objectives.
- How does your organisation's social media strategy support the overall mission?
- How are members of the communication team using social media to enhance and support the organisation's mission?

2. Transparency and Collaboration

- Using social media tools to create a more coordinated environment fosters external transparency and internal collaboration. In fact, some enterprise social tools regularly used by government workers include wikis, blogs, microblogs, social tagging, user comment options and discussion groups.
- How does your organisation support digital government initiatives?
- Are key employees fully trained on how best to use location-independent social collaboration tools?

3. Engaging the Public

Social media changes the way government engages with citizens. This new era of 'citizen engagement' is perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of social media in government because it touches on a true dialogue between government entities and citizens.

- Does your communication policy framework encompass social media platforms?
- What is your Response Strategy (for both negative and positive input) for Citizen Engagement?
- How can private sector innovators work with organisation to engage citizens in providing services?

4. Privacy and Security

A big concern for both government and citizens, privacy and security continue to surface major challenges. The need to protect data is a priority.

- Are your organisation's privacy policies clear regarding collecting personal data and how that data could be used?
- Do the security protocols for your organisation encompass social media do's and don'ts? Is your staff educated on these protocols?

5. Analytics and Metrics

Ensuring accurate, targeted performance analysis is critical for any new program. Good news on this front is the rapid innovation in big data, mobile, etc. Deciding what to measure and establishing baseline is the key to achieving measurable results.

- Has your organisation established a baseline goal of social media metrics?
- Have you clearly identified what you are measuring and why?
- Do you have a plan to combine social media metrics with other data analysis?

Each set of stakeholders have particular agendas and objectives and specific forms of communication with each other and their respective secondary stakeholders. Social media has made that communication dynamic and vibrant. It's also added new obstacles. Citizen participation and engagement is at the foundation of democratic values.

Additionally, citizen engagement initiatives have the ability to build community, grow leaders, and introduce a more collaborative style of government.

Government entities that quickly learn how to master the art and science of using social media effectively are already reaping the benefits of real time engagement and increased collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

Hootsuite for Government

Hootsuite is included in the [Apps.Gov](#) catalog and is listed as a social media dashboard tool for United States government agencies. Some of the innovative government agencies, authorities and organisations who chose HootSuite as their social media dashboard are on the [@hootwatch/gov](#) list.

Written in collaboration with Beverly Macy, co-author of [The Power of Real-Time Social Media Marketing](#).

About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation



Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organisations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organisations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

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